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The Louisiana alternative Career Diploma as institutionalized cultural capital: high school principals' perceptions of its value

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THE LOUISIANA ALTERNATIVE CAREER DIPLOMA AS INSTITUTIONALIZED CULTURAL CAPITAL: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF ITS VALUE

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to address dropout, the Louisiana state legislature mandated an initiative in 2009 which required all school districts to offer an alternative vocational high school diploma. Because this alternative diploma, known as the Career Diploma, is being implemented in all high schools throughout Louisiana, this research was designed to ascertain high school principals' perceptions regarding the Career Diploma's value. Participants were principals of traditional four-year high schools located within the state of Louisiana. A researcher-designed survey instrument was disseminated to 258 high school principals throughout the state. Findings of the data analysis indicated differences in perceptions of value among the four measured dimensions of value. Principals rated the Career Diploma to be valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of not obtaining a standard high school diploma. Principals placed high value on the Career Diploma as a solution to underlying causes of student dropout. Additionally, participants asserted that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation options. However, participants indicated low perceptions of value concerning the Career Diploma's symbolic value.

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background

Throughout the nation, high school dropout has been associated with a variety of adverse social and economic consequences (Adair, 2001; Hood, 2004; Orfield, 2004; USDOE, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2008), the average adult dropout currently makes $16,000 less per year that the average adult with a general education diploma (GED). Dropouts are also more likely to be unemployed that high school graduates (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). In their research on health statistics for U.S. adults, Pleis and Lethbridge-Cejku (2006) found that dropouts are more likely to be in worse health that high school graduates. Students who drop out of school are at higher risk of being incarcerated as adults (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Dropouts are also more likely to be recipients of public assistance (Adair, 2001). The culmination of social and economic consequences of dropout often results in lower tax revenues being generated by these individuals to help fund the public assistance programs that they are most likely to rely upon (Johnson & Schoeni, 2007).

Minority and impoverished students are more at risk of dropping out of school than their White and middle class peers (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Other at-risk groups include those from single-parent homes and students with disabilities (Swanson, 2004). According to the US Census Bureau (2008) Louisiana has a higher rate of poverty (17.6 percent) than the national average (13.2 percent). Louisiana also has a higher per capita minority population, particularly among African Americans (32 percent), than the national average (12.8 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Middle-class students in Louisiana are more likely to attend private schools (17 percent) than the national average (11 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Statistically, Louisiana's

demographic makeup places it at risk for having higher than average dropout rates. Compared to the national graduation rate in the 2005-2006 school year (73.2 percent), Louisiana's graduation rate was 59.5 percent, second only to Nevada (55.8 percent) for the lowest graduation rate in the nation. Louisiana's graduation rate for the following 2006-2007 school year was 61.3 percent, compared to the national average (73.9 percent). That year Louisiana's graduation rate rose in ranking from the second lowest to the fifth lowest in the nation (USDOE, 2008). The rise in national rankings that year was in part attributable to graduation rates in other states declining rather than Louisiana's modest gain of 1.8 percent. That same year, Louisiana also happened to lead the nation in per capita incarceration rates (Lodge, 2008).

Louisiana's dropout rate is not merely a function of demographics; it is also influenced by educational policy, such as the policy in Louisiana Department of Education's (LDE) Pupil Progression Plan (Bulletin 1566) requiring statewide high stakes testing. Research has linked high stakes testing for promotion between grades with higher rates of dropout (AERA, 2000; Clark et al., 2000; Gordon & Reese, 1997; NCTM, 2000; Neil, 2004; Noddings, 2002; Rosenshine, 2003). Many advocates of high stakes testing for grade promotion argue that such requirements are likely to motivate students to improve their performance (Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Raymond & Hanushek, 2003; Shepard, 2000). However, concerns have been expressed regarding possible unintended consequences of high stakes testing that may contribute to inequalities in public education. One concern is that such tests can lead to diminished curricula, focused on low-level skills (Allensworth, 2004; Amreim & Berliner, 2002). Another concern is that such tests present additional obstacles for struggling students who are already at risk of dropping out (McNeil, 2005). In his investigation of the unintended consequences of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Ryan (2004) found that pressures placed on schools and students tended to distort educational practice to the detriment of struggling students.

Louisiana's high stakes testing policy is relatively new, having become effective in 2001 (LDE, 2009). The decision to base the promotion of 4th and 8th graders primarily on the results of a standardized, criterion-referenced exam was influenced by a national trend towards standards-based education reform (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Paige, 2001; Youngs & Bell, 2007). The current standards-based reform movement can be traced back to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The report, published by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, alerted the American public to what was described as a failing school system. According to this report, the failure of the public school system made American students unqualified for the workforce and less competitive internationally. Failure also presented a national security threat (NCEE, 1983). The authors of the report, recommended that school systems: strengthen graduation requirements, provide rigorous and measurable standards, increase time in schools, and improve the quality of teaching (NCEE, 1983).

Based upon a widespread response to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), state, federal, private entities suggested ways to improve public education via high standards and strict accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2004). This narrative of high expectations and accountability, along with equal opportunity for quality education was accompanied by a series of federal and state education initiatives (Sunderman & Kim, 2004; USDOE, 2009). In 1986, the National Governors Association developed recommendations for the improvement of educational accountability. Included in these recommendations was the idea of high stakes testing for 4th and 8th graders (USDOE, 1990). In1989, the recommendations were developed into six national educational goals by the Executive Office of the President, known as *America 2000* (Braun, 2004; Kohn, 2000). This began a period of reform-based incentives in which the federal government awarded funds to states that voluntarily aligned their educational programs with America 2000 (Amreim & Berliner, 2002). At that time, Louisiana developed a model

accountability program (LDE, 1998). This program included academic content standards, standardized assessment for 3rd - 12th grade, professional development for teachers, and a provision that, effective in 2000, would make Louisiana the only state in the nation to have high stakes testing for grade promotion (LDE, 1998). Louisiana's educational reform efforts were soon followed by large-scale national reform in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Now, with over 10 years of standards-based reforms, Louisiana still faces an undeniable dropout problem. In the Spring of 2009, the state legislature responded by introducing legislation that would require all school districts in the state to offer an alternative vocational curriculum and diploma to students who could not meet the high stakes testing requirement. Despite objections voiced by the state superintendant of education, Paul Pastorek, Governor Bobby Jindal signed the legislation into law in June of 2009 (Associated Press, 2009, June 27). The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) formalized curricular guidelines and required districts to draft individual plans (LDE, 2009). Several districts applied for and were allotted waivers, excusing them from the Career Diploma requirement in its initial year (LDE, 2009).

The introduction of this legislation has prompted much debate about the merits of such a diploma (Sentell, 2009). Debate about the value of vocational verses the value of general education surrounding Louisiana's Career Diploma has become part of educational discourse in local and national news publications. The literature traces this debate back to the origins of vocational education with the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, and even earlier (Anderson, 1988; Kantor, 1986).

The Smith-Hughes Act, also known as the Vocational Act of 1917, was the first official commitment of the federal government to include vocational education in the k-12 public school system (Meyer, 1967; Patterson, 2010; Prentice Hall Documents Library, 2009; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999). Introduced by U.S. senators Hoke Smith and Dudley Hughes, this

act included agriculture, trades and industry, and home economics in K-12 public education (Hillison, 1999). This act was prompted in part by the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education, created by President Woodrow Wilson in 1914. This commission was created to study national aid to vocational education (Hayward, 1993). The commission reported that workers in the United States engaged in agriculture and manufacturing were severely undertrained, emphasizing the need for vocational education on a national level (Smith, 1999). Since that time, a series of federal laws have been enacted to create, support, and expand vocational education in K-12 public education.

Educational leaders, researchers, and theorists have grappled with the idea of implementing vocational education as a means for overcoming social inequalities reflected in public education. In the late 1800s, Booker T. Washington argued that newly-freed African Americans should work in the agricultural, industrial, and service industries, asserting that political and civil equality would naturally follow economic prosperity (Anderson, 1988). His message to African Americans was that political and social equality were less important concerns than economic respectability and independence (Kantor, 1986). Opposing this ideology, W.E.B. Dubois argued that the greatest opportunity for African Americans to obtain social and economic equality would be through comprehensive, liberal education. DuBois did not assert that everyone was suited for such an education, but perhaps an elite few could become highly educated and, in turn, use that education to help them lead the race to equal status. He referred to this hypothetical group as the *talented tenth* (Lewis, 1993). DuBois asserted that vocational education had its place, but could not lead to true equality for the oppressed African Americans (DuDois, 1903).

In the early 1900s, prominent educator David Snedden advocated a model of vocational training that could accommodate the specific needs of the existing labor force (Drost, 1967). According to Snedden, vocational education should be structured to guide low achieving

students into required career pathways for which they seemed best suited (Gordon, 1999). Snedden argued that the industrial social system and its accompanying socioeconomic structure are unavoidable facts of life, and that the educational system should align itself accordingly (Kantor, 1986).

Educator and philosopher John Dewey argued, however, that the idea of highly specific vocational education works against the function of public education as a means for preparing students to function as equal citizens in a democratic society (Scheffler, 1995). Explaining that an overemphasis on vocational skills training has the potential to reproduce socioeconomic inequalities, Dewey asserted that his differences with Snedden and other advocates of narrowly defined vocational education were not only educational, but also social and political (Hyland, 1993). Like DuBois, Dewey did not outright reject vocational education, but suggested that it should be available to all students and should be supplemental to the general curriculum (Kantor, 1986).

Theoretical Framework

The concept of social capital was developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu through his studies of the French educational system in the 1970s and early 1980s (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977, 1986, 1996; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977). Cultural capital theory identifies the interconnectedness of power, cultural practices, social status, and resources that structure the lived realities of individuals (Fowler, 1977). Capital is traditionally thought of in economic terms. However, Bourdieu expands the concept to include both social and culture forms of capital (Crompton, 2008). Like money, cultural capital can be used to obtain social resources, i.e. wealth, power, and status (Bourdieu, 1996). Cultural capital exists in relation to other forms of capital; it works with other forms of capital to establish advantages and disadvantages in society (Bourdieu, 1984).

Other forms of capital include economic, symbolic, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Economic capital is wealth that is typically passed down through the family or generated from interactions with other individuals (Bourdieu, 1977). Symbolic capital is a less concrete form of capital that is created by socially-constructed perceptions of value. For example, Bourdeau & Passerson (1977) assert that a degree from an Ivy League school is considered superior to a degree from a public state institution largely due to its symbolism, as opposed to its literal merits. Social capital exists as relative standing in social hierarchies and social networks (Bourdieu, 1977). Social relationships can increase an individual's ability to progress socially and economically. Bourdieu (1986) explains that one form of capital can be utilized to gain another. For example, economic capital can be used to gain cultural capital, and cultural capital can help acquire social capital.

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. *Embodied cultural capital* consists of the properties of one's self (e.g. physical appearance, style of dress, race, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1986). Included within embodied cultural capital is *linguistic capital*, defined as "the mastery of and relation to language" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.114). *Objectified cultural capital* includes physical objects that are owned, such as luxury automobiles or expensive jewelry. Finally, *institutionalized cultural capital* consists of institutional recognition, most often in the form of academic credentials or certifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutional recognition can serve as a guide within the job market, wherein both employees and employers can negotiate terms based upon its relative value (Bourdieu, 1996). It is this type of cultural capital that is applied to this study of the Career Diploma.

Statement of the Problem

Research indicates that dropout is a significant issue for both individual dropouts and society in general. Many legislative solutions have been enacted to address such issues as dropout and

have produced mixed results (USDOE, 2009). In 2009, the Louisiana state legislature created an alternative vocational diploma to help address dropout. There has been much debate over the merits of vocational education compared to a liberal education. Because Louisiana's Career Diploma is new and not fully implemented, it is not known how valuable the Career Diploma will be for struggling students, and future graduates of this vocational program.

In light of cultural capital theory, the alternative Career Diploma exists as a form of institutionalized cultural capital. As capital, the Career Diploma possesses a certain value relative to other available forms of institutionalized cultural capital. Ultimately, the cultural and symbolic values of this alternative diploma hold significant influence over the range of social, cultural, and economic opportunities available to its bearers. Therefore, it is important to investigate the perceived value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma.

Purpose of the Study

There is a substantial base of literature regarding vocational education (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Patterson, 2010; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001), but not about the specific application of such a program to address dropout in Louisiana. To develop this kind of research, it will be beneficial to understand the perceptions of school leaders regarding the perceived value of Louisiana's Career Diploma. The extent to which school leaders share common beliefs about the value of this vocational diploma and its implications is unclear. The purpose of this study is to identify and clarify school leaders' perceptions of the relative, symbolic, preventative, and mitigative value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma.

Research Questions

Based upon a review of the literature and explorations into vocational education as a solution to dropout, the following four research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma has symbolic value?
2. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of student dropout?
3. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of dropout?
4. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation options?

Study Design

This study used a quantitative survey design of perceptual data regarding the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma. This involved a measurement procedure that asked questions of a group of respondents via an online, researcher-designed questionnaire. The researcher administered the survey to principals of traditional high schools in Louisiana.

Definition of Terms

The nature of this study makes definitions of terms essential to the discussion. Therefore, clarification of certain terms is provided. Terms used in this study include the following:

1. Achievement Gap - the difference in academic performance between different ethnic groups (USDOE, 2009)
2. Cohort Graduation Rate – a measure of graduation rate based upon the percentage of 9^{th} graders within the same group complete 12^{th} grade within four years (USDOE, 2009)
3. Culture – a structure of meaning that is produced, reproduced, and used by active subjects (Bourdieu, 1977)

4. Cultural Capital – forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society (Bourdieu, 1977)
5. High Stakes Test - a test with important consequences for the test taker (e.g. grade retention) (USDOE, 2009)
6. Poverty – family income below predetermined wealth thresholds (e.g. less than $22,025 for a family of four) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009)
7. Liberal Education – an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1998)
8. Mitigator – A person, place, or thing that reduces the impact of something
9. Reconstruction Period - the period in U.S. history (1865–1877) during and after the American Civil War in which attempts were made to solve the political, social, and economic problems arising from the readmission to the Union of the 11 Confederate states that had seceded at or before the outbreak of war (Anderson, 1988)
10. Social Class – the hierarchical arrangements of people in society as economic or cultural groups (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977)
11. Social Reproduction – the processes which sustain or perpetuate characteristics of a given social structure or tradition over a period of time ((Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977)
12. Standards-Based Reform – the history of educational laws and policies supporting outcomes-based education (USDOE, 2009)
13. Social Stratification – a relational set of inequalities with economic, social, political and ideological dimensions (Barker, 2005)

14. Traditional Public High School – a four-year public high school, grades 9 – 12 with no special designations, such as: charter school, lab school, academy, magnet school, alternative school, juvenile corrections school, or any form of private school
15. Vocational Education – the teaching of procedural knowledge for use in a career or trade (Gordon, 1999)
16. Zero Tolerance Policy – a policy which imposes automatic punishment for infractions of a stated rule, with the intention of eliminating undesirable conduct (Kelling, Julian, and Miller, 1994)

Assumptions

This study makes the following assumptions about the procedures and participants:

1. Respondents reported their views accurately concerning the value of the Career Diploma.
2. The questionnaire is sufficiently comprehensive to provide valid coverage of current approaches to character education.
3. The data came from a representative sample of school leaders throughout the state.

Limitations

To obtain a large enough response rate, the researcher has selected all regular 9^{th} – 12^{th} high schools in the state of Louisiana to participate in this study. It is possible that there may be more participation from some regions in the state than others, or more participation from one type of school than others, which may impact the results of the survey.

Delimitations

This study includes principals from only traditional 9^{th} -12^{th} grade high schools in the state of Louisiana.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides the statement and development of the problem in this study. The researcher lists the research questions as well as the background information on the Career Diploma and the concepts associated with it. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 describes the research design along with procedures to be used to accomplish the research. Chapter 4 presents the research findings. In Chapter 5 the researcher provides a summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the research, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Summary

To address the issue of dropout, the Louisiana state legislature mandated that all high schools offer an alternative vocational diploma, known as the Career Diploma. Issues of concern regarding this diploma include a lowering of academic standards, the possibility of increasingly stratified educational outcomes, and uncertainty about the value of the diploma for the students who attain it. It is important, therefore, to gain an understanding of what value school leaders place on this alternative diploma.

This study surveys school leaders throughout the state of Louisiana to determine perceptions of the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma. It is the researcher's hope that legislators, state and local educational policy makers, and school leaders can use information from the present study to maximize the value of the Career Diploma for students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study investigates the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma. To operationalize such an abstract concept, it is necessary to explore the contexts in which it exists (Best & Kahn, 1998; Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004). It is also important to discuss the historical development of vocational education and the discourse surrounding it. This literature review includes research on the theoretical, historical, and practical implications of a state using an alternative vocational diploma to address the issue of dropout.

In order to provide complete and meaningful analyses, this literature review is divided into four parts. The first part explicates the theoretical framework guiding this study, Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory. The second part reviews research on dropout, which is what the Career Diploma was created to address. The third part examines literature on how high stakes testing policies such as Louisiana's can inadvertently exacerbate a dropout problem. The fourth and final part reviews the history and development of vocational education in the public school system. Of particular interest is the historical debate concerning the benefits of vocational education for individuals and society as a whole. This research is essential to understanding the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma.

Cultural Capital Theory

The concept of cultural capital was developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu through his studies of the French educational system in the 1970s and early 1980s (Crompton, 2008; Bourdieu, 1973, 1977, 1986, 1996; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Fowler, 1977; Robbins, 1991; Sulkunen, 1982; Webb et al., 2001). Cultural capital theory identifies the interconnectedness of power, cultural practices, social status, and resources that structure the lived realities of

individuals (Fowler, 1977). Capital is traditionally thought of in economic terms, however Bourdieu expands the concept to include both social and culture forms of capital (Crompton, 2008). Cultural capital operates within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge and symbols that confer power and status in society (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital can be a useful theoretical tool for understanding such phenomena as links between socioeconomic status and academic achievement.

Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital encompasses a wide range of behaviors, orientations, symbols, and linguistic competencies, which Bourdieu & Passerson (1977) call "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language" (p. 82). Bourdieu's primary concern with regard to cultural capital is the ease with which it can be utilized to perpetuate social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977). He explains that each social class has its own collection of cultural identifiers that is maintained and transmitted primarily through the family; Bourdieu calls this their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977).

Habitus

A habitus is a system of perceptions, assumptions, behaviors, and values characterized by a pervasive and deep embedding within a person's body, language, and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977; Crossley, 2001; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Davis, 1992). The habitus embodies a cultural world view, relationships between individuals inside and outside of the social class, and shared values and beliefs (Defrance, 1995). Individuals develop their patterns, viewpoints, and dispositions in response to both determining structures (e.g. economic class, family, ethnicity, etc.) and external conditions, *fields*, they encounter (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu, the habitus provides the necessary skills to navigate within a variety of fields, such as social activities, education and the workplace (Crossley, 2001). The habitus is continuously recreated by interactions and choices, based upon previous successes and failures (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp,

1996). Constructed neither completely by social structures nor completely by individual agency, the habitus exists somewhere between determining structures and purposive choices (Dumais, 2002). As Bourdieu & Passerson (1977) explain, the habitus "as the site of internalization of the externality, and the externalization of the internality, can fully bring to light the social conditions of performance of the function of legitimating social order" (p. 205).

Class Culture

Bourdieu (1977) asserts that the high value placed on the dominant class' cultural values is a reflection of its powerful position within society, and this class is able to impose its definition of reality upon all other classes (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977). As a result, individuals are not simply socialized into the values of society as a whole, but are also socialized into specific class cultures (Crompton, 2008). This process of socialization prepares individuals for life in their respective social classes (Sulkunen, 1982).

Forms of Captital

Like money, cultural capital can be used to obtain social resources (i.e. wealth, power, and status) (Bourdieu, 1996). Cultural capital exists in relation to other forms of capital; it works with other forms of capital to establish advantages and disadvantages in society (Bourdieu, 1984). Other forms of capital include economic, symbolic, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Economic capital is wealth that is typically passed down through the family or generated from interactions with other individuals (Bourdieu, 1977). Social capital exists as relative standing in social hierarchies and social networks (Bourdieu, 1977). Social relationships can increase an individual's ability to progress socially and economically. Bourdieu (1986) explains that one form of capital can be utilized to gain another. For example, economic capital can be used to gain cultural capital, and cultural capital can help acquire social capital. Bourdieu (1986) points

out that cultural capital is not instantly passed on, but is built up over time, become part of one's habitus.

Types of Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital consists of the properties of one's self (e.g. physical appearance, style of dress, race, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1986). Included within embodied cultural capital is linguistic capital, defined as "the mastery of and relation to language" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.114). Objectified cultural capital includes physical objects that are owned, such as luxury automobiles or expensive jewelry. These cultural goods can be used for economic profit and also for the purpose of symbolically conveying value and status for the holder (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, institutionalized cultural capital consists of institutional recognition, most often in the form of academic credentials or certifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutional recognition can serve as a guide within the job market, wherein both employees and employers can negotiate terms based upon its relative value (Bourdieu, 1996).

Cultural Capital Theory and Education

Bourdieu (1986) asserts that both economic and cultural influences are central to differential achievement throughout the school system. The school transmits knowledge and values that privilege the dominant class (Laureau & Weinenger, 2003). To possess high amounts of cultural capital indicates that one is educated, smart, or talented; to not have that cultural capital suggests that one is considered ignorant, uneducated, or uneducable (Laureau & Weinenger, 2003). This suggests that students who have been socialized into dominant cultural values are much more likely to be successful in school. If the education system promotes mainstream, middle-class values and ideals, then students already familiar with those values and ideals will be advantaged by the school system itself.

Cultural capital theory challenges the dominant narrative, which attributes academic success and failure to talent and merit. Bourdieu (1977) describes school success, not as the result of individual talent or achievement, but rather the effective use of cultural capital to negotiate the field of education (Bourdieu, 1996). According to Bourdieu (1977), success in school is a socially constructed phenomenon, and largely the result of students having access to large amounts of cultural capital. Academic achievement can be considered, in essence, the product of an investment of time and cultural capital into a student (Laureau & Weinenger, 2003).

Social Reproduction in Schools

All students have an equal opportunity to succeed in school, and in this sense, the school system may appear to be fair and neutral. However, a school is only neutral in relation to a student's ability to conform to the dominant cultural values perpetuated throughout the school system (Crossley, 2001; Dimaggio, 1982; Harker, 1990; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Morrow & Torres, 1995). Bourdieu & Passerson (1997) suggest that two major functions of schools are social elimination (removal of groups of students from access to higher knowledge and social rewards reserved for the privileged class) and differentiation (separating students into hierarchical categories).

Bourdieu (1997) argues that, ultimately, the result of public education is social reproduction. By conferring institutionalized cultural capital (i.e. diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.), schools are in a position to regulate the reproduction of wealth, privilege, and power in a legitimate way. (Laureau & Weinenger, 2003). Logically, if everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, then failure must be a consequence of individual failings, rather than the result of structural inequalities within the system (Powers, 2000). In this way, Schools may appear to be neutral in evaluating students, but because the knowledge and dispositions they value correspond to the *habitus* and cultural capital of the dominant class, students from the dominant class consistently

perform better in school (Crompton, 2008). Success in school requires cultural resources that not all students have (Bourdieu, 1996; Rosenbaum, 1976). Bourdieu (1977) argues that the likelihood of educational success for students from mainstream, middle-class backgrounds (who are familiar with the habitus of the dominant culture) is enhanced, because educators evaluate students by criteria established by the dominant culture. According to Bourdieu (1984), the curricula, instructional practices, and methods of assessment are all part of a fundamental structure in education that advantage students from mainstream, middle class backgrounds over others.

The Career Diploma as Institutionalized Cultural Capital

In light of cultural capital theory, the alternative Career Diploma exists as a form of institutionalized cultural capital. The option of the alternative diploma allows for students who are unable to graduate with a regular diploma to no longer be considered as students who have failed to earn a standard diploma (or as students whom the educational system has failed to prepare for a standard diploma), but as students who have successfully earned a Career Diploma. The fact that the Career Diploma is optional implies that pursuit of it is more a matter of individual choice than a consequence of structural inequalities within the school system.

With regard to Bourdieu and Passerson's (1977) ideas on social elimination and differentiation, these can be observed in the Louisiana public school system in two basic ways: first, through a high stakes testing system that predictably eliminates students from the regular diploma track and, second, through a subsequent self-elimination process through which struggling students drop out of school. In Willis' (1977) study on social reproduction in the British public school system, lower-class students bonded together, forming a culture that did not value success in school, resulting in dropout. This type of phenomenon could possibly occur around the alternative Career Diploma. The choice that many students now face will be between

either the Career Diploma or dropout. Based upon the structural limitations in place, this could be considered a form of limited agency. The Career Diploma, as a form of institutionalized cultural capital, possesses a certain value, relative to the regular diploma. Ultimately, the cultural and symbolic values of this alternative diploma hold significant influence over the range of social, cultural, and economic opportunities available to its bearers.

Dropout

Student dropout is a problem that affects individual lives, local communities, and the nation as a whole (Adair, 2001; Hood, 2004; Orfield, 2004; USDOE, 2009). The federal government has attempted to address this issue by including graduation rates as part of the accountability provisions in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. However, the goal of reducing dropout rates among at-risk populations while simultaneously raising academic standards for all students has proven to be a formidable challenge (Druian & Butler, 2001). NCLB requires states to provide graduation data annually. These graduation rates are calculated based upon the percentage of ninth graders receiving standard diplomas within 4 years; this is known as the cohort graduation rate (Hall, 2005). There are several variables to consider with regard to student dropout; among these are: demographics, student attitudes and behaviors, family factors, socioeconomic inequalities, and school environment (Rumberger, 2004).

Demographic Factors

Although lack of high school completion is a concern for the nation as a whole, dropout rates among Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, and students from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately high (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007). In 2004, only 50 percent of black students, 51 percent of Native Americans, and 53 percent of Latino/a students graduated from high school (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). Other at-risk populations

include students who live in single-parent homes, those who attend large urban schools, and students with disabilities (Swanson, 2004). Between 2000 and 2007, student graduation rates were stratified along economic lines (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Dropout Rates by Family Income (USDE, 2007)

	National	Lowest Income	Middle Low Income	Middle High Income	High Income
2000	10.9	20.7	12.8	8.3	3.5
2001	10.7	19.3	13.4	9.0	3.2
2002	10.5	18.8	12.3	8.4	3.8
2003	9.9	19.5	10.8	7.3	3.4
2004	10.3	18.0	12.7	8.2	3.7
2005	9.4	17.9	11.5	7.1	2.7
2006	9.3	16.5	12.1	6.3	3.8
2007	8.7	16.7	10.5	6.4	3.2

"Low income" is defined here as the lowest 25 percent of all family incomes, while "high income" refers to the top 25 percent of all family incomes. In 2007, low-income families included those with $18,390 or less in family income, while high-income families included those with $85,500 or more in family income (USDE, 2007).

Student Disengagement

The decision to leave school without graduating is rarely an instantaneous one, but rather a process that occurs over many years (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Leaving school early is the outcome of a long process of disengagement from school (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godber, 2001). Dropout is typically preceded by indicators of withdrawal (e.g., poor attendance) or unsuccessful school experiences (e.g., academic or behavioral difficulties) that often begin in elementary school (Doll, Hess, & Ochoa, 2001). Signs of disengagement typically include lack of connection with school faculty and other students, disinterest in the curriculum, and unpleasant feelings about school (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Researchers have developed models to explain the phenomenon of dropout; among these are the Frustration-Self-Esteem model, the Participation-Identification model, and the Social Capital

model (Finn 1989). The Frustration-Self-Esteem model describes a situation wherein school failure lowers students' self-esteem, and this lowered self-esteem leads to frustration with school, ultimately ending with the student dropping out (Finn 1989). The Participation-Identification model views dropout as the failure of a student to sufficiently participate in school, which leads to a lack of identification with school, both of which are generally necessary for success in school (Finn 1989). The Social Capital model explains how students gain benefits and advantages from having positive relationships with teachers, parents, and peers. Accordingly, students with fewer school-based relationship resources are more at risk for dropping out of school (Gottfredson et al. 1994).

There are a variety of circumstances that occur within schools which can cause students to become disengaged. Students who experience academic or social difficulties may develop poor attitudes toward school (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). Students with inconsistent attendance can easily fall behind academically and disengage from school (Prevatt & Kelly, 2003). Students with behavioral problems are often pushed out of school through formal discipline procedures (Hood, 2004). Invalidating school experiences, such as poor retention or poor grades, can diminish a student's self concept, which has been associated with dropout (Bishop, 2006).

There are also factors outside of the school that can contribute to dropout. Drug and alcohol abuse among teens is associated with academic failure and dropout (Reimer & Smink, 2005). Peer relations can influence student decisions about dropout; in peer groups where dropout is considered acceptable, students are more likely to consider dropout as a viable option (Rosenthol, 1998). In an effort to enhance their self-concept, students may turn toward a variety of counter-productive behaviors, placing them at risk of dropping out of school (Finn, 1989). Student sexual behavior can also play a role (Bishop, 2006). Although many schools and districts

provide resources to both prevent teen pregnancy and to accommodate pregnant students, teen pregnancy remains a significant factor associated with dropout (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002).

Family Factors

Family factors associated with dropout include: types of parental support, monitoring and supervision of children outside of school, attitudes toward education, and levels of expectations regarding school performance (Gleason & Dynarski, 1998). Lack of parental involvement in school has been associated with increased risk of dropout (Soan, 2006). Families who do not value education may consciously or subconsciously communicate low expectations of academic achievement to their children (Wilson, 2000). Students from non-English speaking homes often face the additional obstacle of a language barrier (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

Student mobility is significantly associated with school failure (South, Haynie, & Bose, 2007). High rates of mobility can greatly diminish the opportunities for students to develop a sense of value for school or to establish meaningful connections (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; South et al., 2007). As Ream (2003) points out, high mobility has the potential to "inhibit students' efforts to make new friends, adjust socially to a new school situation, and develop reciprocal relations with school personnel" (p. 239). High mobility is associated with disengagement from school at both early and late stages (Swanson and Schneider 1999).

Socioeconomic Inequalities

Socioeconomic inequalities have been strongly correlated with differentiated academic outcomes (Adair, 2001; Brooks et al., 1997; Evans & Schamberg, 2009; Swanson, 2009; Wilson, 2000). Students from the low socioeconomic backgrounds experience a dearth of opportunities that could benefit them in school (Soan, 2006). Parents with low educational achievement are less able to assist their children with academic assistance or help them to navigate the formal and informal structures of the school system (Wilson, 2000). Impoverished students often have less

access to instructional resources, such as technology, which could be utilized to assist them with school (Rothstein, 2004). Students from poor, ethnic communities often have sociolinguistic cultural patterns that are not aligned with mainstream, middle class cultural patterns (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006). Students from impoverished communities commonly deal with survival-oriented concerns (e.g. lack of food, neighborhood crime, and unstable living arrangements) (Hupfeld, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2001; Wald & Martinez, 2003). Such concerns easily distract from school-based priorities (Rothstein, 2004). Parents of these students tend to have very little social or cultural capital within the mainstream, middle-class sphere, and therefore have negligible influence within the school system (Bourdieu, 1977; Dumais, 2002). Having limited access to quality health care can have significant consequences on poor students' success in school (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Muenning, 2005). This can result in such outcomes as excessive absences due to illness, not having glasses, malnutrition, etc. (Rothstein, 2004). Impoverished students also have fewer opportunities to engage in high quality extracurricular enrichment activities outside of school (e.g. piano lesson, private tutors, summer camps, etc.) (Evans & Schamberg, 2009). Such activities have been shown to be beneficial to the development of core academic activities (Evans & Schamberg, 2009; Wilson, 2000).

School Environment

Cultural conflicts between home and school environments are often barriers to student success (Meeker, Edmonson, & Fisher, 2009). Ineffective discipline systems (e.g. those that are inconsistent, reactive, or reliant upon "zero-tolerance" policies) can lead to many at risk students either dropping out or being removed from the school system (Skiba & Peterson 1999). For example, excessive suspensions often cause students to fall behind academically tend to alienate students from school (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Supportive counseling for students has been noted as lacking in many high-risk schools (Rumberger, 2004). School climates that are

characterized by hostility between students and authorities are a common barrier to student investment in education (Meeker, Edmonson, & Fisher, 2009). Ineffective instructional strategies, particularly those lacking differentiation, can be frustrating and discouraging for already-struggling students (Lehr, Hanson, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003). An overemphasis on standardized exams, without sufficient attention to other demonstrations of learning has been a criticism of schools in today's Age of Accountability (Cornoy & Loeb, 2002). Low expectations, communicated by teachers and the school environment in general, have been linked with low student outcomes (Lehr et al., 2003). In at risk schools there tend to be lower rates of certified and highly qualified teachers (Rothstein, 2004).

Consequences for Dropouts

Dropping out of high school can have lifelong consequences on an individual's future. Dropouts are more likely than are high school graduates to be unemployed (Baum & Payea, 2004; Day & Newburger, 2002). There is a correlation between dropout and poor health (Muenning, 2005). Dropouts are more likely that high school graduates to live in poverty (Adair, 2001). Dropouts are more likely to rely upon public assistance (Adair, 2001). Dropouts are more likely to become parents of future dropouts (Manlove, 1998). Dropouts are more than eight times more likely than high school graduates to be in jail or prison (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). According to the US Department of Justice (2009), 72 percent of all prisoners are high school dropouts. The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was almost $10,000 less than for a high school graduate (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006).

Social Costs of Dropout

For society, the costs of dropout are estimated in terms of additional expenditures for: welfare programs, unemployment programs, costs associated with increased levels of incarceration, and loss of tax revenues costing the nation billions of dollars per year (Caputo, 2005; Catterall, 1985;

Christenson et al., 2000; Harlow, 2003; Johnson & Schoeni, 2007; Moretti, 2005; Rousse, 2005). Dropouts are more likely to commit crimes, which have consequences not only for the criminal, but for society as well (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001; Moretti, 2005; Western et al., 2004). Dropouts are more likely to be single parents who rely upon society for welfare, medical care, and other benefits (Barton, 2005). Dropouts are more likely to depend upon the government for health care assistance (Bridgeland, et al. 2006). Low annual earnings among dropouts produce less tax revenue to support governmental programs, which dropouts are most likely to need (Bridgeland, et al. 2006).

Dropout in Louisiana

"Nearly 80% of the nation's high schools that produce the highest number of dropouts can be found in just 15 states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas)" (Balfanz and Legters, 2004, p. v). As indicated by this statistic, it is clear that Louisiana struggles with high rates of dropout. Approximately 65% of the students who enter 9th grade in high schools across Louisiana earn diplomas in within four years (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2009). Because this graduation rate is based upon the cohort graduation rate, it does not account for students exiting the system prior to attaining 9^{th} grade status. Louisiana has a high stakes, exams in 4^{th} and 8^{th} grades that students must pass in order to become 9^{th} graders (Louisiana Department of Education [LDE], 2009). Because of these gatekeeper exams, there is a population of overage 8^{th} grade students who fail the 8^{th} grade exam and subsequently drop out of school prior to entering high school (LDE, 2009). Without this number being included in the official dropout count, it is difficult to determine Louisiana's true dropout rate. However, it is clear that the inclusion of these students into the dropout count

would reduce Louisiana's overall graduation rate, particularly so with regard to the state's at risk minority and impoverished subgroups.

High Stakes Testing in Louisiana

The need for Louisiana's school system to provide opportunities and support for all students to be successful is complicated by the state's requirements for students to pass high stakes exams to both enter and exit high school (LDE, 2009). Although high stakes exams can help to ensure that students have attained specific competencies prior to graduating, an unintended consequence may be an increase in the number of students who drop out (Corvers & Franklin, 2003). In their investigation of the relationship between minimum competency testing and dropout Kreitzer, Madaus, and Haney (1989) found there to be a significant link between state dropout rates and the use of high school exit examinations. As Reardon (1996) explains, "In schools with high concentrations of low-SES students, MCT (minimum competency test) graduation requirements are linked to sharply higher dropout rates" (p. 7). Reardon and Galindo (2002) found that students who were required to pass 8th-grade promotion tests to advance to the 9th grade were substantially more likely to drop out before 10th grade. Jacob (2001) found that students in the bottom quintile of achievement are especially likely to dropout when faced with high school exit examination requirements. Amrein and Berliner (2002) concluded that "high school graduation exams increase dropout rates, decrease high school graduation rates" (p. 47). The individual and social benefits associated with high-stakes achievement testing exist within the context of social and individual costs associated with that policy. In fact, such examinations may even serve to widen social and economic disparities with regard to high school graduation rates (Heubert, 2000).

Grade Retention and Dropout

The link between retention and dropout is well established (Alexander et al., 1997; Janosz et al. 1997; Roderick 1994; Rumberger 1995; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996). Policies that support grade retention for students who fail high stakes tests are linked to higher dropout rates (Jacob, 2001; Kreitzer et al., 1989). Alexander et al. (2003) found that, on average, retained students have lower achievement levels and/or more disciplinary problems than do students who are promoted continuously throughout school.

The experience of retention can influence students' perceptions of school and shape the ways in which they deal with schooling in the future (Jimerson et al. 2002). Gottfredson et al. (1994) pointed out that retention may stigmatize students and inhibit their ability to bond with teachers and other students, greatly reducing their levels of social capital within the school system. Therefore, retained students may develop negative attitudes toward school and teachers, further alienating them from the educational supports they would need to be successful (Gottfredson et al, 1994). Alexander et al. (2003) point out that another risk factor is that retained students often have lower self-esteem than their classmates even before they fail a grade. Because retained students are older than their peers, they may also be more susceptible to societal pressures that lead them to disengage from school (Stearns & Glennie 2006). Jimerson et al. (2002) explain, "The experience of being retained may influence numerous factors determined to be associated with dropping out of high school (e.g., student's self esteem, socio-emotional adjustment, peer relations, and school engagement)" (p. 442).

The literature suggests that a lack of dropout prevention efforts and an absence of systems for monitoring at risk students can greatly diminish opportunities for schools to increase graduation rates for all students. At risk students are often left without the supports necessary to be successful in school (Orfield et al., 2004). This is reflected in outcomes that are consistently

stratified by socioeconomic status (USDOE, 2009; Swanson, 2004). Research suggests that it will require a comprehensive set of solutions to mitigate the costly burden of dropout on society (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Neild, et al., 2008; Pinkus, 2008). Such solutions should addresses the underlying causes of student disengagement while simultaneously helping students to meet high academic standards (Steinberg & Almeida, 2008).

High Stakes Testing

Louisiana's public school system has many factors that make it at risk for high rates of dropout (Adair, 2001; Brooks et al., 1997; Evans & Schamberg, 2009; Swanson, 2009; Wilson, 2000). Because of the state's high rate of students attending private schools (16%), is higher than the national average (11%), there is a higher concentration of impoverished students (LDE, 2009). In the 2005-2006 school year, 61% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch; the national average that year was 41% (LDE, 2009). The school system is also almost half (49%) African American (LDE, 2009). These two, often overlapping, subgroups are considered at risk for dropout (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997). This potential for high dropout rates is intensified by the state's use of high stakes testing for promotional purposes, which have been correlated with higher rates of dropout among high risk students (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Flanagan, 2001; Grissmer & Jacob, 2002; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Lipman, 2004; Raymond & Hanushek, 2003; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005).

Events Leading to High Stakes Testing in Louisiana

The publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) alarmed Americans with its claims that the public education system was failing. According to the report, this failure made American students unqualified for the workforce, less competitive internationally, and presented a national security threat (NCEE, 1983). The authors of the report, President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended that school

systems: strengthen graduation requirements, provide rigorous and measurable standards, increase time in schools, and improve the quality of teaching (NCEE, 1983)**.** Since that time, the narrative of standards-based accountability has led to a series of initiatives that have transformed the role and function of the American public school system (Grissmer et al., 2000; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Paige, 2001; Youngs & Bell, 2007).

Policies that require students to pass minimum competency exams are designed to add value to the high school diploma by ensuring a minimum level of proficiency in basic skills (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002). Some states began to use high school exit exams as a form of high-stakes testing in the 1970s (Erpenbach et al., 2003). Based on the belief that low academic standards and social promotion were responsible for a lack of job skills among high school graduates, demands for accountability via testing increased throughout the 1980s, (Raymond & Hanushek, 2003). The concern at that time was that if all it took to earn a high school diploma was attending for 12 years, then a diploma was worthless (Orfield & Cornhaber, 2001). By 1984, 19 states, required students to pass at least one test in order to graduate from high school (Amreim & Berliner, 2002).

In the years since *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the discourse of high expectations, accountability, and equal opportunity for quality education has been accompanied by a series of federal and state education initiatives (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Sunderman & Kim, 2004; USDOE, 2009). In 1986, the National Governors Association developed recommendations for the improvement of educational accountability that, in 1989, were developed into six national educational goals by the Executive Office of the President, known as *America 2000* (Braun, 2004; Kohn, 2000) (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Goals of America 2000

America 2000	
Goal 1	Readiness for School: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
Goal 2	High School Completion: By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
Goal 3	Student Achievement and Citizenship: By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject.
Goal 4	Science and Mathematics: By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
Goal 5	Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning: By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate.
Goal 6	Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools: By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence
Source: Executive Office of the President (1990). National Goals for Education. Washington, D.C. ED 319 143. Retrieved March 15, 2010, from: http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/index.html.	

America 2000 provided incentives in the form of federal funding for states that voluntarily adopted the national educational goals (Raymond & Hanushek, 2003; USDOE, 2009). By 1992, over 48 states had committed to America 2000 (Amreim & Berliner, 2002). By the mid-1990s, 18 states had test-based requirements for high school graduation (Amreim & Berliner, 2002; Bond & King, 1995; Heubert & Hauser, 1999). In 1994, under the Clinton administration, America 2000 became Goals 2000: Educate America Act (H.R. 1804) and made it a federal law under the Improving America's Schools Act, (Erpenbach et al., 2003). Goals 2000 required each state to develop accountability systems that included content and performance measures (USDOE, 2009).

In 2001, the Bush Administration incorporated Goals 2000 into the more comprehensive No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (USDOE, 2009). The goal of NCLB was to bring all students up to a level of academic "proficiency" within a 15-year period (USDOE, 2009).

NCLB required states to develop strategic plans to meet the assessment and accountability mandates in the law (see Table 2 for an overview); states that did not comply were threatened with a the loss of federal education funding (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Paige, 2001; USDOE, 2009). Under NCLB, testing for all public school students became standard and tied to rewards and consequences for state and local school systems (Jones et al., 2003; Ryan, 2004).

Table 3

Overview of No Child Left Behind Requirements

Overview of Requirements for States Under NCLB
1. All states must identify a set of academic standards for core subject areas at each grade level.
2. States must create a state assessment system to monitor student progress toward meeting these state-defined standards.
3. States must require schools and districts to publish report cards identifying academic achievement of its students in aggregate and disaggregated by ethnicity and other sub groups.
4. States must create a system of labels that communicate to the community how local schools and districts are performing.
5. States must create a plan (i.e., Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP) that would ensure 100 percent of its students will reach academic proficiency by the year 2014-2015.
6. States must come up with a system of accountability that includes rewards and sanctions to schools, educators, and students that are tied to whether they meet state's goals outlined in the AYP plan.
Source: No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 § 1001, 20 U.S.C. § 6301. Retrieved March 15, 2010, from: http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf

Louisiana's Response to Standards-Based Education Reform

Louisiana responded to federal mandates by passing Act 478 of 1997, which created a District and School Accountability Advisory Commission to develop and recommend to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) a statewide system of school and district accountability (LDE, 2009). The act required that the educational system provide specific and appropriate standards for schools and school districts, indicators for the assessment of schools and school districts, student achievement baselines, student growth targets, appropriate minimum levels of student achievement for each public school and district, rewards and corrective actions,

specific intervals for assessment and reassessment of schools and districts, a review process for evaluating growth targets and technical assistance (LDE, 2009).

The advisory commission's 1998 report outlined what would become the framework for the state's accountability system. This framework included the addition of high stakes testing for the promotion of 4th and 8th grade students to the already established high school exit exam (LDE, 2009). In 1998 the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted the Louisiana Public School and District Accountability System, and within two years, Louisiana became one of the first states to utilize standardized tests for promotional purposes (LDE, 2009). The high stakes testing policy is contained in the Louisiana Department of Education's (LDE) Bulletin 1566: *Pupil Progression Policies and Procedures Division of Student Standards and Assessments.*

The practice of requiring students to pass a test in order to be promoted from grade to grade has been implemented in a small number of states despite challenges to the effectiveness of such testing policies on teaching and learning (AERA, 2000; Clark et al., 2000; Gordon & Reese, 1997; NCTM, 2000; Neil, 2004; Noddings, 2002; Rosenshine, 2003). Proponents of high stakes tests for grade promotion have generally argued that such requirements are likely to motivate students to improve their performance (Anagnostopoulos, 2006; Clark et al., 2000; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Raymond & Hanushek, 2003; Shepard, 2000). However, opponents argue that such tests can lead to a diminished curriculum focused on low-level skills and increase dropout rates by discouraging students who fail the tests from persisting in school (Allensworth, 2004; Amreim & Berliner, 2002; McNeil, 2005; Pedulla et al., 2003; Reardon & Galindo, 2002; Sunderman & Kim, 2004; .

Supporters of high stakes promotional tests further assert that conditioning grade promotion on the passage of standardized tests, can prompt students to work harder by pressuring them with

the threat of sanctions (Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998; Roderick et al., 2002; Pedulla et al., 2003; Thompson, 2001). Advocates of high stakes testing have contended that NCLB and similar state policies guarantee that teachers and schools maintain high standards for low-SES and minority students and help them achieve at high levels (Grissmer et al., 2000; Linn, 2000; Youngs & Bell, 2007).

Opponents of the tests argue, however, that such tests present additional obstacles for struggling students who are already at risk of dropping out (Darling-Hammond 1991; Haney, 2000; Jones et al., 2003; McNeil, 2005; Thompson, 2001). There are also concerns that the negative effects of high stakes tests are disproportionately concentrated on those most at risk of dropping out, including minority and low-income students (Lipman, 2004; McNeil, 2005; Swanson, 2004). Some oppose high stakes testing, because it focuses on a single indicator of to make critical promotional decisions about individuals or schools (AERA, 1999; Jones et al., 2003; Linn, 2000; Thompson, 2001). Others express concern that high-stakes testing can cause school officials to view struggling students as liabilities. (Jones et al., 2003; Ryan, 2004). The demands and pressures associated with high stakes can interfere with teachers' ability to address student needs outside of test preparation (Pedulla et al., 2003). Darling-Hammond (2004) argues that overemphasis on test scores leads to "a narrower curriculum; to test-based instruction that ignores critical real world skills, especially for lower-income and lower performing students; and to less useful and engaging education" (p. 18).

Despite having an accountability system that exceeds federal standards, Louisiana has persistent problems with dropout. The Southern Educational Review Board (SREB) (2009), reports that Louisiana's graduation rate dropped from 64 percent in 2002 to 60 percent in 2006. This statistic does not include the population of students who drop out of school prior to entering 9th grade (LDE, 2009). These early dropouts are not part of the 9th grade cohort group and were

not, therefore, included by the LDE in its official dropout statistics reported to the USDOE. These early dropouts are typically over the age of 16, in eighth grade, and unable to pass the high stakes eighth grade exam (LDE, 2009). Although these early dropouts are not counted in the official graduation rate, their presence has social and economic consequences for the state (Caputo, 2005; Catterall, 1985; Christenson et al., 2000; Harlow, 2003; Johnson & Schoeni, 2007; Moretti, 2005; Rousse, 2005). This is suggested by Louisiana's incarceration rate. The Baton Rouge Advocate reports "In Louisiana last year, 857 of every 100,000 residents were in prison, a rate that led the nation, federal records show" (Lodge, 2008, p. 1A). The article goes on to quote Russell Jones, the Jesse N. Stone Professor of Law at Southern University, "Louisiana's pockets of poverty and lack of achievement in public education are contributing to the state's prison population" (Lodge, 2008, p. 1A). Aware that, despite all of its ongoing accountability efforts, the Louisiana Department of Education still had a significant dropout problem, members of the Louisiana state legislature intervened, creating an alternative vocational career pathway for struggling students.

The History and Development of Vocational / Technical Education in Schools

Vocational education in the United States resulted from an evolutionary process (Brock, 1992). Vocational education encompasses a variety of programs, including: agricultural education, business education, family and consumer sciences, health occupations education, marketing education, technical education, technology education, and trade and industrial education (Gordon, 1999). A vocational curriculum is generally characterized by a combination of classroom instruction, hands-on activities, and work-based experiences (Pulliam & Patten, 2002). Vocational programs are generally designed to align with both the needs of society and the student (Thattai, 2001). The difficulty of striking such a balance has been a critical issue in the historical development of vocational education (Gordon, 1999).

The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (PL 347)

The Smith-Hughes Act, also known as the Vocational Act of 1917, was the first official commitment of the federal government to include vocational education in the k-12 public school system (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Patterson, 2010; Prentice Hall Documents Library, 2009; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001). Introduced by U.S. senators, Hoke Smith and Dudley Hughes, this act included agriculture, trades and industry, and home economics in k-12 pubic education (Hillison, 1999). This was prompted in part by a political alliance formed in 1910 that demanded federal funding for vocational education. This alliance was between the American Federation of Labor (AFL) the National Association of Manufacturers' (NAM) in the promotion of trade instruction in schools (Gordon, 1999). The AFL had previously been opposed to vocational education, but believed that federal support for vocational education was inevitable and wanted to have influence over the process (Gordon, 1999). In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson created the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education to study national aid to vocational education (Hayward, 1993). The commission reported that workers in the United States engaged in agriculture, and manufacturing, were severely undertrained, emphasizing the need for vocational education on a national level (Smith, 1999).

The Smith-Hughes Act created a Federal Board of Vocational Education to establish and oversee the operation of vocational education (Hillison, 1999). Also, the act mandated the creation of state boards to work with the Federal Board of Vocational Education (Findlay, 1977). This federal board required states to submit plans detailing their programs for vocational education and teacher training in specific vocational areas; they were also required to submit annual reports on the status of vocational education in their state (Meyer, 1967). The act provided annual federal funding for vocational programs, teacher training, and half of vocational

teacher's salaries (Patterson, 2010). This law targeted employment preparation for teenage students (Scott and Sarkees-Wircenski, 1996).

Although the act was intended to promote vocational education in the public school system, many parts of the Smith-Hughes Act were designed to keep vocational education separate from academic education (Gordon, 1999). For example, this act allowed funds to be used for the salaries of vocational teachers, but not for the salaries of academic teachers (Pulliam & Patten, 2002). The law required students who received instruction from teachers paid with Federal vocational education funds to receive no more than 50 percent academic instruction (Hayward & Benson, 1993). Students in vocational programs were taught job-specific skills but not critical thinking or academic skills. Although these policies were intended to promote the advancement of vocational education, they served to create a divide between vocational and academic education programs (Prentice, 2001). Prior to the Smith-Hughes Act, vocational programs were limited and severely underfunded (Patterson, 2010). By the middle of the 20th century, vocational education had become a major feature of American public education (Prentice, 2001).

The Vocational Education Act of 1963 (PL 88-20)

In 1963, the Vocational Education Act replaced the Smith-Hughes Act (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Patterson, 2010; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001). This act brought about fundamental changes in the way that vocational education was funded. For example, categorical funding for specific vocational programs, such as agricultural education, was eliminated (Thattai, 2001). Federal funds began to be allocated to states based upon of their population demographics (Ornstein & Levine, 1993). The federal government no longer provided direct control over vocational education, and states were allowed to decide how to spend their funds (Gordon, 1999). This act increased funding for the establishment of work study and the expansion of existing agricultural and home economics

education; it also required states to submit plans describing their vocational education programs (Hillison, 1999).

Amendments to Vocational Education Act of 1968 (PL 90-576)

In 1968 the Vocational Education Act was amended, resulting in increased funding for vocational education (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Patterson, 2010; Prentice Hall Documents Library, 2009; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001).. Funds could now be used, not only for high school programs, but also for students who had left school, retraining programs, students with disabilities, construction of vocational schools, vocational guidance, contracting vocational education with private institutions, research, teacher training, and administering state plans (Smith, 1999). This amendment also allocated money to consumer and homemaking education (Bodilly, Ramsey, Stasz, & Eden, 1993). Under this amendment, the funding formula for appropriations to each state required that: 25% had to be spent on disadvantaged populations, 25% had to be spent on out-of-school individuals seeking employment, and 10% had to be spent on students with disabilities (Smith, 1999). Funds were also authorized for: curriculum development, residential vocational schools, and research (Hayward & Benson, 1993).

The Educational Amendments of 1976 (PL-94-482)

Title II of the Educational Amendments of 1976 provided additional funding for vocational education (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967;; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001; Williams, 1977). The goals of theses amendments were to: improve existing programs, develop new programs, and eliminate sex discrimination in vocational education (Brock, 1992). Under these amendments, funds could be spent on: vocational education, work study, energy education, area school facilities, support of sex equity positions, placement services, industrial arts, support services for females in vocational education, day care

services, displaced homemakers, and residential vocational centers, and assistance for economically disadvantaged students (Haward & Benson, 1993). These amendments also required that all vocational programs be evaluated every five years (Patterson, 2010).

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 (PL 98-524)

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 focused on accessibility to all individuals and improved quality of vocational education (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001; USDOE, 2004). In accordance with this legislation, fifty-seven percent of state funds were to be allocated to specific populations: disabled (10%), disadvantaged (10%), adult retraining (12%), single parents and homemakers (8 1/2%), sex bias & stereotyping (3 1/2%), and incarcerated (1%) (Skinner & Apling, 2005). Forty-three percent of state funds were to be allocated for program improvement, however funds were not to be used to maintain existing programs (Skinner & Apling, 2005). Funds were set aside for consumer and homemaking programs, but 33% of the funds had to be spent in economically depressed areas (USDOE, 2004).

Perkins II: The Amendment to Carl D. Perkins Act of 1990 (PL 101-392)

The Carl D. Perkins Act was reauthorized in 1990 (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001; USDOE, 2004). In this amendment, accessibility and special populations were still a major focus, but money could now be used to support existing programs ((USDOE, 2004). This amendment required that, academic and vocational education be integrated, and that there be formalized articulation between secondary and post-secondary institutions (USDOE, 2004).

The School to Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 (PL 103-239)

In 1994, to address a national skills shortage, the School to Work Opportunities Act was established (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Morrissey & Hicks,

1995; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001). This act was designed to create partnerships between educators and employers (USDOE, 2006). A variety of programs were established to get students more involved with work and post-secondary education, with grants being given to some states for program development (Skinner & Apling, 2005). Temporary funding was made available for: collective partnerships, integrated curriculum, technological advances, adaptable workers, career guidance, work-based learning, and a step-by-step approach (USDOE, 2006).

Perkins III: Amendment to Carl D. Perkins Act of 1998 (PL 105-332)

In 1998 the Carl D. Perkins Act was amended to enhance the academic, vocational, and technical skills of secondary students and post-secondary students enrolled in vocational and technical education programs (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001; USDOE, 2004). Unlike earlier versions of Perkins, this amendment did not emphasize accessibility for students with special needs (USDOE, 2004). This amendment was designed to increase accountability and provide states with more flexible funding (Skinner & Apling, 2005). At the local levels, funds could be spent on: strengthening the academic and vocational and technical skills of students; providing students with strong experience in and understanding of all aspects of an industry; developing, improving, or expanding the use of technology in vocational and technical education; providing professional development programs to teachers, counselors, and administrators; conducting evaluations of the vocational and technical education programs; initiating, improving, expanding, and modernizing quality vocational and technical education programs; and linking secondary and post-secondary vocational and technical education (USDOE, 2004).

Perkins IV: Amendment to Carl D. Perkins Act (2006) (PL 109-270)

In the most recent amendment of the Carl D. Perkins Act, the language has been changed from vocational education to career and technical education (Barger, 2004; Findlay, 1977; Gordon, 1999; Meyer, 1967; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Smith, 1999; Thattai, 2001; USDOE, 2006). This amendment continues to emphasize: challenging academic and technical standards, integration of academic and career and technical instruction, links between secondary and postsecondary education, school/community partnerships, ongoing research, and technical assistance that promotes leadership, initial preparation, and professional development for career and technical education teachers, faculty, administrators, and counselors (USDOE, 2006).

Louisiana's Career Diploma

In response to Louisiana's persistently high dropout rate, both House Bill 612 and Senate Bill 259 were introduced by Representative Jim Fannin and State Senator Robert Kostelka respectively LDE, 2009). The collective goal was to keep struggling students from dropping out of high school by offering them a less rigorous graduation alternative, focused on vocational and technical course work (LDE, 2009). In June of 2009, these bills were signed into law as Acts 246 and 298 by Governor Bobby Jindal. This legislation modifies the requirements for advancement to the 9th grade and allows students fifteen and older (with parental consent) to opt out of the standard curriculum (LDE, 2009). Previously, eighth-grade students were required to score basic competency in English or math and at least approaching basic in the other category on the standardized LEAP (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program) tests in order to be promoted to the ninth grade (LDE, 2009). Under the new law, career-track students who, are at least 15 years old, may be promoted to ninth grade by scoring approaching basic on either the math or ELA sections of the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) exam, even if they fail the other (LDE, 2009).

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) establishes the entrance and curriculum requirements for the Career Diploma (Appendix A). Students who enroll in the career-track curriculum must take at least seven career or technical courses before graduation, some of which can be offered through the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LDE, 2009). The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) partners with the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) to develop courses. Students may switch diploma pathways annually, prior to the beginning of the school year, specifically switching from the regular diploma pathway to the Career Diploma pathway or vice versa, (LDE, 2009). Regardless of pathway, all students must meet the attendance and behavior requirements of their local district pupil progression plans (LDE, 2009).

In addition to the Louisiana state legislature's creation of Career Diploma, the Louisiana Department of Education has also increased its number of graduation options. Beginning with the 2008-2009 school year, incoming high school freshmen were presented with the options of: the Louisiana Core 4 Curriculum (Appendix B), which is required by most of the state's four-year colleges and universities; the Louisiana Basic Core Curriculum (Appendix C), which qualifies students for two-year colleges, technical schools and some four-year colleges; and the previously-designed Options 3 Program, which prepares students for the general education diploma (Appendix D) (LDE, 2009). Students completing the Core 4 curriculum have the option of earning a diploma endorsement. This can be accomplished by exceeding the standard diploma requirements by taking additional electives and scoring exceptionally high on the Graduate Exit Exam. Endorsements include an Academic Endorsement (Appendix E) and a Career/Technical Endorsement (Appendix F). All graduation pathways, except for Options 3, require students to pass End of Course (E.O.C.) exams throughout the each program (Louisiana Department of Education, 2010). Although other states have begun to offer vocational/technical diplomas

(Table 4), Louisiana is the only state to offer such a diploma with lower graduation standards than the regular diploma.

Table 4.

States Offering Vocational/Technical Diplomas

State	Description
Alabama	The state offers two (2) Career/Technical diploma endorsement options: the Alabama High School Diploma with Career/Technical Endorsement and the Alabama High School Diploma with Advanced Career/Technical Endorsement. The former is equivalent to the standard diploma, and the latter has requirements beyond the standard diploma (ALA. ADMIN. CODE R. 290-3-1-.02).
Arkansas	State offers a technical diploma with requirements that are equivalent to a standard diploma (Code Ark. R. 005 22 006, 005 15 013).
Florida	State offers a career education certification that is placed on a student's diploma when the student meets certain requirements that exceed those of a standard diploma (FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1003.429, 1003.431, 1003.491).
Georgia	State offers four (4) standard diplomas including two (2) technical / career diplomas: Technology/Career-Preparatory (TC), which is a standard diploma, and Technology/Career Preparatory with Distinction (TC+) which has requirements exceeding the standard diploma options (GA. COMP. R. & REGS. r. 160-4-2-.47 *and* -48).
Indiana	State offers standard diploma with technical honors endorsement. Requirements for technical endorsement exceed those of the standard diploma (IND. ADMIN. CODE tit. 511, r. 6-7-9, 6-7.1-7, 6-7.1-9)
Kentucky	State does not have separate technical diploma but offers Career Major Certificate and Department of Education Career and Technical Certificate of Achievement. Requirements for these certificates require coursework in addition to that required for a standard diploma (KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 158.140; 705 KY. ADMIN. REGS. 4:231).
New York	State offers a career/technical endorsement that is placed on a student's diploma when the student meets certain requirements that exceed those of a standard diploma (N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 8, § 100.2, 100.5).
North Carolina	State offers five (5) standard diplomas including two (2) technical / career diplomas: Career-Preparatory and College Tech. Prep, both of which are standard diploma options (N.C. ADMIN. CODE tit. 16, r. 6D.0503; N.C. GEN. STAT. § 115C-81).
Ohio	State offers a career/technical endorsement that is placed on a student's diploma when the student meets certain requirements that exceed those of a standard diploma (OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 3313.60, 3313.603; OHIO ADMIN. CODE § 3301-35-04).
Virginia	State offers a career and technical education seal that is placed on a student's diploma when the student meets certain requirements that exceed those of a standard diploma (VA. ADMIN. CODE § 20-131-50).

Discourse around the Career Diploma

From its earliest inception, as a mere suggestion in the state legislature, Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma has led to much debate. As the Associated Press (2009) explains, "There is little disagreement on the need to reduce the state's 35 percent dropout rate, which ranks among the nation's highest. But educators are divided about the need to lower educational standards to meet that goal." As reported in the Associated Press (2009, June 27), "The career-track diploma law was backed by Gov. Bobby Jindal but opposed by some good-government groups and education officials, including Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek." Several districts throughout the state expressed concern about being able to implement the curriculum within a year, resulting in LDE granting 19 waivers (LDE, 2009).

Sen. Ben Nevers, D-Bogalusa, chairman of the Senate panel stated, "I do not look at the Career Diploma as anything other than a way to save some of our students" (Anderson, 2009, p. 1B). In his commentary in the Times Picayune entitled, "Louisiana 'Career Diploma' Bill Is a Cynical Sham," DeBerry (2009) calls the Career Diploma "apparent shorthand for 'no career will be had with this pretend diploma'" (p. 1A). Sentell (2009) points out in his article, "Career Diploma Comes under Fire," "Backers said students likely to drop out need new options to stay in school." (p. 2A). Port Allen school board member, John Bennett, is quoted by the Associated Press (2009) saying, "I have a great fear of this becoming a dumping-ground diploma." Louisiana's Monroe Gazette reports, "Pastorek initially opposed the legislation last year, calling it a plan for 'dummy diplomas' in a private meeting with legislators, but eventually agreed to support the program and has publicly voiced his support for the program since then" (Largen, 2010, p. 1A). Because this program is new, and has not been afforded an opportunity to produce empirical results, it is clear that thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the Career Diploma are rooted in its symbolic meaning and value.

Historical Debate Concerning Vocational Education

The current debate about the Career Diploma is, in essence, a debate about the purpose of education itself. This debate has taken place for millennia (Callaway, 1979). However, the context of this particular debate includes such issues as: economics, class, race, gender, and the role of education in a democratic society. Examples of such debates have taken place in the United States over the past century. The period of Reconstruction following the end of slavery brought up the question of liberal education versus vocational education as a means of social and economic progress for the newly-freed African Americans (Anderson, 1988). Shortly following that period began, a time of agricultural and industrial expansion that resulted in federal legislation, which impacts vocational education to this day (Kantor, 1986).

Washington and DuBois

In the latter part of the 19th century, the most influential voice in the discourse on African American education was Booker T. Washington (Anderson, 1988; Franzt, 1997; Gordon, 1999; Hyslop, 2000; Johnson, 1996; Kantor, 1986; Merriman, 2005; Scheffler, 1995; Smith, 1999; Washington, 1901). Known for his philosophy of self-help, economic independence, and social accommodation, Washington promoted vocational education for African Americans as a way to help them acquire the career skills that would help them work their way up the social ladder and improve their economic status (Anderson, 1988). Through his writings and speeches, Washington shared his thoughts on the values of hard work, self-determinism, and self discipline with both African American and White audiences, raising public awareness of the complex educational needs of the time (Scheffler, 1995). Washington is largely remembered for this "Atlanta Compromise" speech, in which he suggested that African Americans should forgo efforts for social equality in exchange for jobs and industrial-agricultural education. (Anderson, 1988). His message to African Americans was that political and social equality were less

important concerns than economic respectability and independence (Kantor, 1986). Recommending that African Americans work in the agricultural, industrial, and service industries, Washington asserted that political and civil equality would naturally follow economic prosperity. (Anderson, 1988). Washington eventually established the Tuskegee Institute for the education of African Americans, which focused on vocational and technical education for African Americans (Hyslop, 2000). Washington's willingness to accommodate African Americans into the existing social and political power structure was criticized by other black leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois (Anderson, 1988).

The first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, Dubois conducted numerous studies of black society in America between 1897 and 1914 (Anderson, 1988; Franzt, 1997; Gordon, 1999; Hyslop, 2000; Johnson, 1996; Kantor, 1986; Merriman, 2005; Scheffler, 1995; Smith, 1999; Washington, 1901). His studies were based on the assumption that social science could provide answers to race problems (Anderson, 1988). DuBois believed that the best chance for African Americans to obtain social and economic equality would be through the education of an elite few who, in turn would be able to lead the race to equal status; he referred to this hypothetical group as the "talented tenth" (Lewis, 1993). DuBois believed that "the purpose of education is not to make men carpenters, but to make carpenters men" (Aptheker, 1973, p. 64). Ultimately, DuBois believed that achieving manhood is the only acceptable goal for education. "If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men" (Dubois, 1903, p. 68).

Snedden and Dewey

Due to technological advances throughout the 1700s and 1800s, the 20th century began with a shortage of skilled laborers in the agricultural and industrial fields (Barger, 2004; Gorden, 1999;

Meyer, 1967; Patterson, 2010; Pulliam & Patten, 2002; Snedden, 1910; Thattai, 2001). A prominent educator during the Progressive era, David Snedden was an advocate of social efficiency–an approach to educational that reconciled the demands of industrial society with the capabilities and interests of children (Drost, 1967; Gordon, 1999; Kantor, 1986; Levesque et al., 1995). Snedden advocated a model of vocational training that could accommodate the specific needs of the existing labor force (Drost, 1967). According to him, vocational education should be structured to guide low achieving students into required career pathways for which they seemed best suited (Gordon, 1999). Snedden argued that the industrial social system and its accompanying socioeconomic structure are unavoidable facts of life, and that the educational system should align itself accordingly (Kantor, 1986). According to Snedden, the primary purpose of vocational education is meeting labor force needs and preparing students with low academic performance for a variety of career options (Gordon, 1999). Snedden's views on vocational education for social efficiency, that differential characteristics inevitably produce a social and economically-stratified society, can be considered a type of social Darwinism (Smith, 1999).

Accepting socioeconomic inequalities as inevitable, Snedden assumed that most students recieved little or no benefit from a liberal educational curriculum (Drost, 1967). Not accounting for challenges that students from lower economic backgrounds face, he attributed academic failure on an inherent inability to understand abstract concepts (Smith, 1999). Snedden did not see the logic in exposing low-performing students to liberal, comprehensive high school curricula, finding this to be counterproductive in terms of social-efficiency (Gordon, 1999). Lacking specific job skills, graduates from liberal education programs are unqualified to begin a trade and, therefore, represent a burden on society (Drost, 1967). He asserted that vocational training in secondary education is essential to meeting labor force demands and strengthening the

national economy (Smith, 1999). According to Snedden, the ideal vocational education program is one that enables low-performing students to immediately and fully participate in the labor force (Hayward & Benson, 1993).

John Dewey, who was outspoken on education, domestic and international politics, opposed Snedden's social-efficiency framework (Archambault, 1964; Dewey, 1916; Dewey, 1938; Martin, 2003). Dewey believed that vocational education would ultimately exacerbate class stratification, stating that, "Any scheme of vocational education, which takes as its point of departure from the industrial regime that now exists, is likely to assume and perpetuate its divisions and weaknesses, and thus become an instrument in accomplishing the feudal dogma of social predestination" (Dewey, 1916, p. 318). According to Dewey, the idea of highly specific vocational education works against the function of public education as a means of preparing students to function as equal citizens in a democratic society (Scheffler, 1995). Explaining that an overemphasis on vocational skills training has the potential to reproduce socioeconomic inequalities, Dewey asserts that his differences with Snedden and other advocates of narrowly defined vocational education were not only educational, but also social and political (Hyland, 1993). Dewey does not outright reject vocational education, but suggests that it should be available to all students and designed to enhance their choices in life (Kantor, 1986). He asserts that vocational education should be incorporated into the general curriculum to help students develop a wide range of capacities that expand, rather than limit, career options (Hyland, 1993). Dewey (1916) argues against the idea of the public school system being relegated to simply a servant of industry, suggesting that specialized vocational training should take place outside of the school. According to Dewey (1916) "The only adequate training for occupations is training through occupations" (p. 310).

These historical debates reflect the ongoing discourses concerning curriculum and instruction, individual agency, and the role of public education in a democratic society as they pertain to vocational education today. What unifies all four perspectives is a focus on the value each form of education holds for students as future participants in society. Each theorist promotes the type of education they believe will maximize social and economic opportunities for individuals. Bourdieu (1977) asserts that social, cultural, and economic structures limit options and opportunities by producing barriers that must be negotiated using various forms of capital. According to his theory of cultural capital, Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma is a form of institutionalized cultural capital that holds value for its bearers. The question is, "How much value?" This study investigates this alternative Career Diploma with regard to its value as emerging form of capital.

Summary

This review of literature discussed Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma in its theoretical, practical, and historical contexts. The Career Diploma was created by the Louisiana state legislature in response to the state's dropout rate, which ranks among the highest in the nation. In addition to the typical socioeconomic factors responsible for Louisiana's high dropout rate, its statewide high stakes testing policy has served to further exacerbate the state's dropout problem. Recognizing that high rates of dropout create both social and economic burdens for the state, the Louisiana state legislature intervened, mandating that all school districts offer an alternative Career Diploma for at risk students. This legislation has stimulated debate about the merits of such a diploma. This debate has historical roots that predate the first federal legislation supporting vocational education in the public school system. Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory describes how the Career Diploma is a form of institutionalized cultural capital that has

value. Chapter 3 will use quantitative methodology in the form of a questionnaire to investigate school leaders' perceptions of the value of the Career Diploma for its bearers.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, AND PROCEDURES

Statement of the Problem

Persistently high rates of dropout among Louisiana students led state legislators to pass a law requiring an alternative Career Diploma to be offered by all high schools. This diploma is available for students who are unable to pass either the state's mandatory competency exam to enter high school, or the mandatory high school exit exam required to graduate from high school. This study investigates how school leaders perceive the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma has symbolic value?
2. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of student dropout?
3. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of dropout?
4. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation options?

Methodology

This study seeks to identify school leaders' perceptions regarding the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher developed a questionnaire (Appendix G) designed to acquire school leader perceptions in the following areas: (a) the symbolic value of the Career Diploma, (b) the value of the Career Diploma as a solution to underlying causes of dropout, (c) the value of the Career Diploma as a mitigator of

consequences for not obtaining a regular diploma, and (d) the value of the Career Diploma relative to other graduation options. After obtaining approval from Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix H), the researcher sent an email to principals (Appendix I) requesting their participation in this study. In order to obtain representation from all congressional districts and geographic regions throughout the state, the researcher included all regular 9^{th} – 12^{th} grade high school in Louisiana (Appendix J).

Research Design

Survey research was the method of study used. This involved a measurement procedure that asked questions of a group of respondents via an online, researcher-designed questionnaire.

Population

The researcher administered the survey to principals of traditional high schools within the state of Louisiana. The researcher sent details of the study, as well as the approval letter from Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board, to each district's superintendent. An email was then sent to the principals with information about the study and the instructions for participation.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of all principals of traditional high schools in the state of Louisiana. The researcher selected this as the sample in order to obtain equal representation from all districts and regions throughout the state. Louisiana has a total of: 5 cultural regions, 8 congressional districts, 69 regular public school districts, and 258 regular public high schools The study ensured anonymity by reporting results without using school or participant names.

Instrumentation

The author of this study designed a Likert-style, questionnaire with a demographic response section. The wealth of literature on cultural capital theory, dropout, and vocational education

enabled the researcher to develop the content of the survey. The pilot questionnaire included items based on four contextual areas related to the value of the Career Diploma: (a) the symbolic value of the Career Diploma, (b) the value of the Career Diploma as a solution to underlying causes of dropout, (c) the value of the Career Diploma as a mitigator of consequences for not obtaining a regular diploma, and (d) the relative value of the Career Diploma. Fifteen educators enrolled in graduate school at Louisiana State University completed the pilot questionnaire. The educators reviewed the questions, answered them and made comments about their clarity. The entire questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes for each participant to complete. Participant comments indicated a lack of clarity for three items. Later analysis of the data suggested lack of clarity for two additional items as well. Subsequent changes to the survey included separating one question into two, changing terms, deleting items, and adding items.

The final questionnaire used a four point scale (4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree). The researcher clustered the items to create scores in 4 areas: (a) symbolic value, (b) value for addressing causes of dropout, (c) value for mitigating consequences of not obtaining a regular diploma, and (d) relative value. Written directions were given at the beginning of the survey form. The survey included demographic questions regarding: job classification, years of experience, race, gender, and school demographics.

Content Validity

An extensive search of the literature yielded possible survey items. Multiple inspection and reanalyses of the survey after a pilot test led to revisions of items that were redundant, ambiguous, overlapping, or inappropriate. Final survey items were grouped and totaled according to key dimensions of character education, including approaches, implementation, and effectiveness. In addition, Table 5 lists specific sources in the literature for each item.

Table 5.

Content Validity of Survey

Cluster	Items	Source
Relative Value	1. The Career Diploma is as valuable as a standard diploma.	(LDE, 2009)
	19. The Career Diploma is more valuable than a general education diploma.	(LDE, 2009)
	23. The Career Diploma is valuable outside of Louisiana.	(USDOE, 2009)
	15. The Career Diploma has value beyond the minimum wage job market.	(U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006)
	5. The Career Diploma is more valuable than job experience with no diploma.	(Pulliam & Patten, 2002)

Table 5 Continued

	14. The Career Diploma is as valuable as a standard diploma with a Career/Technical endorsement.	(Gordon, 1999)
Symbolic Value	21. The Career Diploma represents responsibility.	(Bourdieu, 1977)
	18. The Career Diploma represents competence.	(Defrance, 1995)
	9. The Career Diploma represents hard work.	(Crossley, 2001)
	13. The Career Diploma represents intelligence.	(Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996)
	2. The Career Diploma represents trustworthiness.	(Davis, 1992)
	11. The Career Diploma represents dependability.	(Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977)

Table 5 Continued

Value as Solution to Underlying Causes of Dropout	8. The Career Diploma is valuable as a motivator for students to persist in school.	(Stearns & Glennie, 2006)
	6. The Career Diploma is valuable in making students feel connected to school.	(Christenson & Thurlow, 2004)
	22. The Career Diploma is valuable as a confidence builder for students.	(Bishop, 2006)
	3. The Career Diploma is valuable for keeping students interested in school.	(Dynarski & Gleason, 2002)
	7. The Career Diploma is valuable in making school relevant for students.	(Finn, 1989)
	4. The Career Diploma is valuable in bridging	(Gottfredson et al. 1994)

Table 5 Continued

	cultural divides between students and teachers.	
Value as Mitigator of Consequences of Not Obtaining Regular Diploma	7. Career Diploma graduates are more likely to maintain steady employment than dropouts.	(Baum & Payea, 2004)
	20. Career Diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to receive government assistance.	(Barton, 2005)
	10. Career Diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to engage in criminal activity.	(Snyder & Sickmund, 1999)
	26. Career Diploma graduates have a wider range of career options than dropouts.	(Newburger, 2002)

Table 5 Continued

	12. Impoverished career diploma graduates have more opportunity to rise out of poverty than impoverished dropouts.	(Adair, 2001)
	5. Career Diploma graduates are more able to form stable family units than dropouts.	(Manlove, 1998)

Reliability

The researcher computed reliability using Chronbach's coefficient alpha, a measure of the instrument's internal consistency. Because intercorrelations among test items are maximized when all items measure the same construct, Cronbach's alpha is widely believed to indirectly indicate the degree to which a set of items measures a single unidimensional latent construct. The coefficient alphas are reported separately for each key dimension of character education, rather than the total survey. Table 5 provides the coefficient alpha for the four clusters describing the value of the Career Diploma. The researcher uses only cluster scores, because they are the focus for analyses.

Table 6.

Reliability Analysis – Scale (Alpha) for Value of Career Diploma Clusters

Value	Alpha	N
Relative Value	.749	6
Symbolic Value	.810	6
Value as Solution	.862	6
Value as Mitigator	.910	6

Procedures for Data Collection

The researcher sent the questionnaire with a cover letter via email to all principals of traditional high schools in Louisiana. The email included information about the study, instructions for completing the web-based questionnaire, and the due date for completion. Individuals were notified that their responses would be coded, so that no names or other self-identifying characteristics would be used in the study. By accessing and completing the web-based survey, stakeholders provided explicit and informed consent for the study. Since entries were anonymous, all potential participants (respondents and non-respondents) received two follow-up electronic reminder letters. Data collection for the quantitative phase occurred from August to September 2010, lasting approximately two weeks.

Data Analysis

Responses to the survey instrument were downloaded into an Excel file, coded numerically and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive analyses of the data were conducted, including frequencies, percentages, means, ranges, and reliability measures for each scale.

Summary

Chapter 3 addressed the methodology, research design, description of the population, and sample to be used in this study. The researcher selected all regular 9^{th} – 12^{th} grade high schools in the state of Louisiana. Items on the questionnaire gathered data on school leaders' perceptions concerning the value of the Career Diploma in four areas: (a) symbolic value, (b) value as a solution to causes of dropout, (c) value as a mitigator of the consequences of not receiving a regular diploma, and (d) relative value. Finally the methods of data analysis were addressed.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Data Collection and Procedures

The researcher collected data from a purposive sample consisting of all regular public high school principals in Louisiana. Two hundred and fifty-eight principals were selected for the study. The survey developed by the researcher assessed the results of the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma has symbolic value?
2. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of student dropout?
3. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of dropout?
4. To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation options?

The researcher formatted the survey electronically via the website www.surveymonkey.com for distribution in the form of web-based links to the survey. Distribution and collection of survey data began with an email to district superintendents followed by emails to the 258 participating Louisiana high school principals. The entire process occurred from August to September, 2010. Survey responses were collected on www.surveymonkey.com and transferred to an Excel spreadsheet for analysis using SPSS. Completed surveys numbered 120 out of a possible 258. Table 7 indicates the demographics of the sample as reported by the respondents in the demographics section of the survey. Individual item results are indicated in table 7.

Table 7.

Demographic Information on Survey Respondents

Divisions	**Categories**	**Responses**
Years of Experience	0-5	3 (2.5%)
	6-15	19 (15.8%)
	16-25	42 (35.0%)
	26 +	56 (46.7%)
Race	White	93 (77.5%)
	Black/Af.Am.	24 (20%)
	Latino(a)	0 (0.0%)
	Asian	0 (0.0%)
	Native Am.	0 (0.0%)
	Pacific. Is.	3 (2.5%)
	Other	0 (0.0%)
Gender	Male	76 (63.3%)
	Female	44 (36.7%)
Title I School	Yes	52 (43.3%)
	No	68 (56.7%)

Table 8.

Descriptive Statistics

	Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	St. Deviation
Q1	The Career Diploma is as valuable as a standard diploma.	120	1	4	2.51	.840
Q2	The career diploma represents trustworthiness (e.g. follows rules when unsupervised).	120	1	4	2.34	.739
Q3	The career diploma is valuable for keeping students interested in school.	120	1	4	2.11	.828
Q4	The career diploma is valuable in bridging cultural divides between students and teachers.	120	1	4	2.73	.786
Q5	Career diploma graduates are more able to form stable family units than dropouts.	120	1	4	2.16	.830
Q6	The career diploma is more valuable than job experience with no diploma	120	1	4	2.15	.827
Q7	Career diploma graduates are more likely to maintain steady employment than dropouts.	120	1	4	1.93	.632
Q8	The career diploma is valuable as a motivator for students to persist in school.	120	1	4	2.08	.693
Q9	The career diploma represents hard work (e.g. works until a job is complete).	120	1	4	2.34	.835
Q10	Career diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to engage in criminal activity.	120	1	4	2.08	.688
Q11	The career diploma represents dependability (e.g. comes to work on time).	120	1	4	2.33	.737

Table 8 Continued

Q12	Impoverished career diploma graduates have more opportunity to rise out of poverty than impoverished dropouts.	120	1	4	1.83	.613
Q13	The career diploma represents intelligence (e.g. easily adapts to new challenges).	120	1	4	2.73	.786
Q14	The career diploma is as valuable as a standard diploma with a Career/Technical endorsement.	120	1	4	2.48	.840
Q15	The career diploma has value beyond the minimum wage job market.	120	1	4	2.27	.796
Q16	The career diploma is valuable in making students feel connected to school.	120	1	4	2.11	.719
Q17	The career diploma is valuable in making school relevant for students.	120	1	4	2.10	.793
Q18	The career diploma represents competence (e.g. completes assignments accurately).	120	1	4	2.44	.731
Q19	The career diploma is more valuable than a general education diploma (G.E.D.).	120	1	4	2.28	.809
Q20	Career diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to receive government assistance.	120	1	4	2.18	.710
Q21	The career diploma represents responsibility (e.g. does not require constant supervision).	120	1	4	2.51	.722
Q22	The career diploma is valuable as a confidence builder for students.	120	1	4	2.03	.709
Q23	The career diploma is valuable outside of the state of Louisiana.	120	1	4	2.44	.776
Q24	Career diploma graduates have a wider range of career options than dropouts.	120	1	4	1.94	.612

Table 9.

Range of Mean Values

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 - 1.45	1.46 – 2.45	2.46 – 3.45	3.46 – 4.0

Responses to individual item were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Table 8). The distributions of responses for each item all fell within normal ranges. The range of values for sample means is indicated in Table 9. Reliability analyses of internal validity of the 4 survey clusters were conducted using Cronbach's alpha. Criterion ratings are indicated in Table 10.

Table 10.

Reliability Analysis Criterion Rating Scale

Criterion Rating Coefficient α (alpha)			
Exemplary	Extensive	Moderate	Minimal
.80 or above	.70 -.79	.60 - .69	.60 or below

Research Question 1

To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma has symbolic value?

The scale item summary statistics (Table 12) indicate that the composite mean for Cluster 1 (N = 120, M = 2.45) falls within the range of Agree. According to the range of mean values (Table 9), the principals agree overall that the Career Diploma has symbolic value. It should be noted, however, that (M = 2.45) is on the extreme end of the Agree range, merely .01 points removed from Disagree.

Inspection of each item mean within the cluster (Table 14) provides more specific data on the composite cluster rating. Question 11, "The Career Diploma represents dependability (e.g.

comes to work on time)," has a mean of (M = 2.33), which falls in the range of Agree. Question 2, "The Career Diploma represents trustworthiness (e.g. follows rules when unsupervised)," has a mean of (M = 2.34), which is in the Agree range. Question 13, "The Career Diploma represents intelligence (e.g. easily adapts to new challenges)," has a mean of (M = 2.73), which is in the Disagree range. Question 9, "The Career Diploma represents hard work (e.g. works until a job is complete)," has a mean of (M = 2.34), which is in the Agree range. Question 18, "The Career Diploma represents competence (e.g. completes assignments accurately)," has a mean of (M = 2.44), which is in the Agree range. Question 21, "The Career Diploma represents responsibility (e.g. does not require constant supervision)," has a mean of (M = 2.51), which is within the Disagree range. Scale item analyses (Table 14) reveal that although the questions 11, 13, and 18 fell into the Agree range, in each case the selection Disagree received the largest number of responses. The cluster inter-item correlation matrix (Table 15) has a reliability rating (Table 15) of (α = .944) which is in the "exemplary" range on the Criteria Rating Scale (Table 10). This indicates a strong relationship among cluster items and high internal validity within the research instrument.

Table 11.

Case Processing Summary (Cluster 1)

		N	%
Cases	Valid	**120**	**100.0**
	Excluded	**0**	**.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**

Table 12.

Summary Item Statistics (Cluster 1)

	Mean	Min.	Max.	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N
Item Means	**2.450**	**2.333**	**2.733**	**.400**	**1.171**	**.024**	**6**
Inter-Item Correlations	**.740**	**.638**	**.816**	**.179**	**1.280**	**.003**	**6**

Table 13.

Item Summary Statistics (Cluster 1)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q11	**2.33**	**.737**	**120**
Q2	**2.34**	**.739**	**120**
Q13	**2.73**	**.786**	**120**
Q9	**2.34**	**.835**	**120**
Q18	**2.44**	**.731**	**120**
Q21	**2.51**	**.722**	**120**

Table 14.

Scale Item Analyses (Cluster 1)

Q2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**12**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**10.0**
	2	**62**	**51.7**	**51.7**	**61.7**

Table 14 Continued

	3	**39**	**32.5**	**32.5**	**94.2**
	4	**7**	**5.8**	**5.8**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**18**	**15.0**	**15.0**	**15.0**
	2	**53**	**44.2**	**44.2**	**59.2**
	3	**39**	**32.5**	**32.5**	**91.7**
	4	**10**	**8.3**	**8.3**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q11

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**17**	**14.2**	**14.2**	**14.2**
	2	**48**	**40.0**	**40.0**	**54.2**
	3	**53**	**44.2**	**44.2**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 14 Continued

Q13

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**9**	**7.5**	**7.5**	**7.5**
	2	**30**	**25.0**	**25.0**	**32.5**
	3	**65**	**54.2**	**54.2**	**86.7**
	4	**16**	**13.3**	**13.3**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q18

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**15**	**12.5**	**12.5**	**12.5**
	2	**39**	**32.5**	**32.5**	**45.0**
	3	**64**	**53.3**	**53.3**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 14 Continued

Q21

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**9**	**7.5**	**7.5**	**7.5**
	2	**48**	**40.0**	**40.0**	**47.5**
	3	**56**	**46.7**	**46.7**	**94.2**
	4	**7**	**5.8**	**5.8**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 15.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix (Cluster 1)

	Q11	**Q2**	**Q13**	**Q9**	**Q18**	**Q21**
Q11	**1.000**	**.638**	**.706**	**.687**	**.816**	**.769**
Q2	**.638**	**1.000**	**.679**	**.722**	**.745**	**.790**
Q13	**.706**	**.679**	**1.000**	**.780**	**.777**	**.760**
Q9	**.687**	**.722**	**.780**	**1.000**	**.783**	**.657**
Q18	**.816**	**.745**	**.777**	**.783**	**1.000**	**.797**
Q21	**.769**	**.790**	**.760**	**.657**	**.797**	**1.000**

Table 16

Reliability Statistics (Cluster 1)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N
.944	**.945**	**6**

Research Question 2

To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of student dropout?

The composite cluster mean (N = 120, M = 2.194) falls within the Agree range (Table 18). This indicates that principals believe the Career Diploma to be valuable as a solution to underlying causes of dropout. Individual item analysis reveals agreement for most, but not all, items.

Question 8, "The Career Diploma is valuable as a motivator for students to persist in school," has a mean of (M = 2.08), which is in the Agree range. Question 16, "The Career Diploma is valuable in making students feel connected to school," has a mean of (M = 2.11), which is in the Agree range. Question 22, "The Career Diploma is valuable as a confidence builder for students," has a mean of (M = 2.03), which is in the Agree range. Question 3, "The Career Diploma is valuable for keeping students interested in school," has a mean of (M = 2.11), which is in the Agree range. Question 17, "The Career Diploma is valuable in making school relevant for students," has a mean of (M = 2.10), which is in the Agree range. Question 4, "The Career Diploma is valuable in bridging cultural divides between students and teachers," has a mean of (M = 2.73), which is in the Disagree range. The scale item analyses (Table 20) reveals no

exceptionalities within the individual item ratings. The inter-item correlation matrix (Table 20) has a reliability rating (Table 22) of (α = .953) which is in the "exemplary" range on the Criteria Rating Scale (Table 10). This indicates a strong relationship among cluster items and high internal validity within the research instrument.

Table 17.

Case Processing Summary (Cluster 2)

		N	%
Cases	Valid	**120**	**100.0**
	Excluded	**0**	**.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**

Table 18.

Summary of Item Statistics (Cluster 2)

Item Means	**Mean** **2.194**	**Min** **2.033**	**Max** **2.733**	**Range** **.700**	**Max/Min** **1.344**	**Var.** **.070**	**N** **6**
Inter-Item Correlations	**.774**	**.628**	**.932**	**.304**	**1.485**	**.007**	**6**

Table 19.

Scale Item Summary (Cluster 2)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q8	**2.08**	**.693**	**120**

Table 19 Continued

	Mean	St. Deviation	N
Q16	**2.11**	**.719**	**120**
Q22	**2.03**	**.709**	**120**
Q3	**2.11**	**.828**	**120**
Q17	**2.10**	**.793**	**120**
Q4	**2.73**	**.786**	**120**

Table 20

Scale Item Analyses (Cluster 2)

Q3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**28**	**23.3**	**23.3**	**23.3**
	2	**58**	**48.3**	**48.3**	**71.7**
	3	**27**	**22.5**	**22.5**	**94.2**
	4	**7**	**5.8**	**5.8**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q8

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	1	**22**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**
	2	**68**	**56.7**	**56.7**	**75.0**
	3	**28**	**23.3**	**23.3**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**

Table 20 Continued

Q16

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**22**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**
	2	**66**	**55.0**	**55.0**	**73.3**
	3	**29**	**24.2**	**24.2**	**97.5**
	4	**3**	**2.5**	**2.5**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q17

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**25**	**20.8**	**20.8**	**20.8**
	2	**65**	**54.2**	**54.2**	**75.0**
	3	**23**	**19.2**	**19.2**	**94.2**
	4	**7**	**5.8**	**5.8**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q22

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Table 20 Continued

Valid	1	**25**	**20.8**	**20.8**	**20.8**
	2	**69**	**57.5**	**57.5**	**78.3**
	3	**23**	**19.2**	**19.2**	**97.5**
	4	**3**	**2.5**	**2.5**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 21.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix (Cluster 2)

	Q8	Q16	Q22	Q3	Q17	Q4
Q8	**1.000**	**.774**	**.798**	**.760**	**.719**	**.628**
Q16	**.774**	**1.000**	**.932**	**.812**	**.865**	**.646**
Q22	**.798**	**.932**	**1.000**	**.795**	**.846**	**.710**
Q3	**.760**	**.812**	**.795**	**1.000**	**.867**	**.742**
Q17	**.719**	**.865**	**.846**	**.867**	**1.000**	**.718**
Q4	**.628**	**.646**	**.710**	**.742**	**.718**	**1.000**

Table 22.

Reliability Statistics (Cluster 2)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N
.953	**.954**	**6**

Research Question 3

To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of the socioeconomic consequences of dropout?

The cluster mean (N = 120, M = 2.021), located in Table 24, indicates that the principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of consequences of dropout. Individual item statistics (Table 25) are consistent with the composite cluster result.

Question 7, "Career Diploma graduates are more likely to maintain steady employment than dropouts" has a mean of (M = 1.93), which is in the Agree range. Question 20, "Career Diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to receive government assistance" has a mean of (M = 2.18), which is in the Agree range. Question 10, "Career Diploma graduates are more likely to maintain steady employment than dropouts" has a mean of (M = 2.08), falling within the Agree range. Question 24, "Career Diploma graduates have a wider range of career options than dropouts" has a mean of (M = 1.94), which is in the Agree range. Question 12, "Impoverished Career Diploma graduates have more opportunity to rise out of poverty than impoverished dropouts" has a mean of (M = 1.83) which is in the Agree range. Question 5, "Career Diploma graduates are more able to form stable family units than dropouts" has a mean of (M = 2.16), which is in the *Agree* range. Uniformity of mean values within the Agree range indicates strong agreement for this research question. The scale item analyses (Table26) reveal that although all of the cluster items were in the Agree range, the strongest levels of agreement were with questions10 and 12, with 91.0% and 91.7% of the respective responses being Agree and Strongly Agree. The inter-item correlation matrix (Table 27) has a reliability rating (Table 28) of (α = .931) which is in the "exemplary" range on the Criteria Rating Scale (Table 10). This indicates a strong relationship among cluster items and high internal validity within the research instrument.

Table 23.

Case Processing Summary (Cluster 3)

		N	%
Cases	Valid	**120**	**100.0**
	Excluded	**0**	**.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**

Table 24.

Summary Item Statistics (Cluster 3)

	Mean	Min.	Max.	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N
Item Means	**2.021**	**1.833**	**2.183**	**.350**	**1.191**	**.019**	**6**
Inter-Item Correlations	**.708**	**.573**	**.849**	**.276**	**1.481**	**.007**	**6**

Table 25.

Scale Item Summary (Cluster 3)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q7	**1.93**	**.632**	**120**
Q20	**2.18**	**.710**	**120**
Q10	**2.08**	**.688**	**120**
Q24	**1.94**	**.612**	**120**

Table 25 Continued

Q12	**1.83**	**.613**	**120**
Q5	**2.16**	**.830**	**120**

Table 26.

Scale Item Analyses (Cluster 3)

Q5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**23**	**19.2**	**19.2**	**19.2**
	2	**65**	**54.2**	**54.2**	**73.3**
	3	**22**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**91.7**
	4	**10**	**8.3**	**8.3**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q7

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
Valid	1	**26**	**21.7**	**21.7**	**21.7**
	2	**78**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**86.7**
	3	**14**	**11.7**	**11.7**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 26 Continued

Q10

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**22**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**
	2	**69**	**57.5**	**57.5**	**75.8**
	3	**27**	**22.5**	**22.5**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q12

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**32**	**26.7**	**26.7**	**26.7**
	2	**78**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**91.7**
	3	**8**	**6.7**	**6.7**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q20

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Table 26 Continued

Valid	1	**19**	**15.8**	**15.8**	**15.8**
	2	**62**	**51.7**	**51.7**	**67.5**
	3	**37**	**30.8**	**30.8**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q24

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**24**	**20.0**	**20.0**	**20.0**
	2	**81**	**67.5**	**67.5**	**87.5**
	3	**13**	**10.8**	**10.8**	**98.3**
	4	**2**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 27.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix (Cluster 3)

	Q7	Q20	Q10	Q24	Q12	Q5
Q7	**1.000**	**.721**	**.630**	**.794**	**.796**	**.678**
Q20	**.721**	**1.000**	**.849**	**.798**	**.573**	**.621**

Table 27 Continued

Q10	**.630**	**.849**	**1.000**	**.749**	**.608**	**.641**
Q24	**.794**	**.798**	**.749**	**1.000**	**.736**	**.763**
Q12	**.796**	**.573**	**.608**	**.736**	**1.000**	**.664**
Q5	**.678**	**.621**	**.641**	**.763**	**.664**	**1.000**

Table 28.

Reliability Statistics (Cluster 3)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N
.931	**.936**	**6**

Research Question 4

To what extent do Louisiana high school principals agree that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other available options?

The composite cluster mean (N = 120, M = 2.35) falls within the Agree range (Table 30). This indicates that the principals believe that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other available options. Individual item analyses reveal that although the composite mean falls within the Agree range, 2 of the 6 cluster items fall within the Disagree range.

Question 1, "The Career Diploma is as a standard diploma," has a mean (M = 2.51), which lies in the Disagree range. Question 6, "The Career Diploma is more valuable than job experience with no diploma," has a mean of (M = 2.15), which is in the Agree range. Question 15, "The Career Diploma has value beyond the minimum wage job market," has a mean of (M = 2.27), which is in the Agree range. Question 14, "The Career Diploma is as valuable as a

standard diploma with a career/technical endorsement," has a mean of (2.48), which is in the Disagree range. Question 19, "The Career Diploma is more valuable than a general education diploma (G.E.D.)," has a mean of (M = 2.28), which is in the Agree range. Question 23, "The Career Diploma is valuable outside of the state of Louisiana," has a mean of (M = 2.44), which is in the Agree range. It should be noted that the mean (M = 2.44) is merely .02 points from the Disagree range. The scale item analyses reveal that although Question 23 fell in the Agree range, the largest number of respondents selected Disagree (Table 32). The inter-item correlation matrix (Table 33) has a reliability rating (Table 34) of (α = .914), which is in the "exemplary" range on the Criteria Rating Scale (Table 10). This indicates a strong relationship among cluster items and high internal validity within the research instrument.

Table 29.

Case Processing Summary (Cluster 4)

		N	%
Cases	Valid	**120**	**100.0**
	Excluded	**0**	**.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**

Table 30

Summary of Item Statistics (Cluster 4)

	Mean	Min.	Max.	Range	Min./Max.	Variance	N
Item Means	2.354	2.150	2.508	.358	1.167	.021	6
Correlations	.642	.434	.814	.381	1.877	.016	6

Table 31.

Scale Item Summary (Cluster 4)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q1	**2.51**	**.840**	**120**
Q6	**2.15**	**.827**	**120**
Q15	**2.27**	**.796**	**120**
Q14	**2.48**	**.840**	**120**
Q19	**2.28**	**.809**	**120**
Q23	**2.44**	**.776**	**120**

Table 32.

Scale Item Analyses (Cluster 4)

Q1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**15**	**12.5**	**12.5**	**12.5**
	2	**41**	**34.2**	**34.2**	**46.7**
	3	**52**	**43.3**	**43.3**	**90.0**
	4	**12**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 32 Continued

Q6

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**29**	**24.2**	**24.2**	**24.2**
	2	**48**	**40.0**	**40.0**	**64.2**
	3	**39**	**32.5**	**32.5**	**96.7**
	4	**4**	**3.3**	**3.3**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q14

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**15**	**12.5**	**12.5**	**12.5**
	2	**44**	**36.7**	**36.7**	**49.2**
	3	**49**	**40.8**	**40.8**	**90.0**
	4	**12**	**10.0**	**10.0**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 32 Continued

Q15

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**19**	**15.8**	**15.8**	**15.8**
	2	**57**	**47.5**	**47.5**	**63.3**
	3	**37**	**30.8**	**30.8**	**94.2**
	4	**7**	**5.8**	**5.8**	**100.0**
Total		**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Q19

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**22**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**
	2	**48**	**40.0**	**40.0**	**58.3**
	3	**45**	**37.5**	**37.5**	**95.8**
	4	**5**	**4.2**	**4.2**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 32 Continued

Q23

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	**15**	**12.5**	**12.5**	**12.5**
	2	**43**	**35.8**	**35.8**	**48.3**
	3	**56**	**46.7**	**46.7**	**95.0**
	4	**6**	**5.0**	**5.0**	**100.0**
	Total	**120**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 33.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix (Cluster 4)

	Q1	Q6	Q15	Q14	Q19	Q23
Q1	**1.000**	**.434**	**.750**	**.721**	**.720**	**.736**
Q6	**.434**	**1.000**	**.500**	**.476**	**.491**	**.538**
Q15	**.750**	**.500**	**1.000**	**.748**	**.772**	**.814**
Q14	**.721**	**.476**	**.748**	**1.000**	**.569**	**.637**
Q19	**.720**	**.491**	**.772**	**.569**	**1.000**	**.729**
Q23	**.736**	**.538**	**.814**	**.637**	**.729**	**1.000**

Table 34.

Reliability Statistics (Cluster 4)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N
.914	**.915**	**6**

Summary

Chapter 4 began with a description of the procedures used for this study. The researcher selected all principals of traditional high schools in Louisiana to be surveyed for perceptional data concerning the Louisiana Career Diploma. Data collection included a questionnaire comprised of 28 items. The researcher designed items to measure levels of agreement among the respondents regarding the value of the Louisiana Career Diploma. Descriptive statistical analysis of the data provided answers to 4 research questions.

Findings included principals' varying levels of agreement regarding the value of the Career Diploma based upon which dimension of value was being addressed: symbolic value, value as a solution to underlying causes of dropout, value as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of dropout, or value relative to other available options.

Respondents agreed that the Career Diploma is valuable in all four dimensions. Agreement was strongest with its value as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of dropout. Second strongest was agreement with its value as a solution to underlying causes of dropout. Third was agreement with its value relative to other available options. Agreement was weakest with the Career Diploma's symbolic value. Analysis of individual items revealed specific aspects of value with which the majority of principals disagreed.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Design

This study utilized survey research as the method of study. This involved a measurement procedure that asked questions of a group of respondents via an online, researcher-designed questionnaire. This study sought to identify high school principals' levels of agreement regarding the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher developed a questionnaire designed to acquire high school principals' levels of agreement in the following areas: (a) the symbolic value of the Career Diploma, (b) the value of the Career Diploma as a solution to underlying causes of dropout, (c) the value of the Career Diploma as a mitigator of consequences for not obtaining a regular diploma, and (d) the value of the Career Diploma relative to other graduation options. The questionnaire was based on the literature in the areas of dropout, vocational education, and cultural capital theory. The researcher field tested the questionnaire and made necessary adjustments. The dissertation committee approved the study and Louisiana State University's Internal Review Board (I.R.B.) granted its permission to complete the study. The researcher distributed 258 surveys, and the overall response rate was 46.5%.

Conclusions

Conclusions emerged from the findings in four areas: (a) levels of agreement that the Career Diploma has symbolic value, (b) levels of agreement that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of dropout, (c) levels of agreement that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of dropout, and (d) levels of agreement that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation options. The following section

discusses cluster results with regard to the research questions in addition to individual responses within clusters.

Symbolic Value

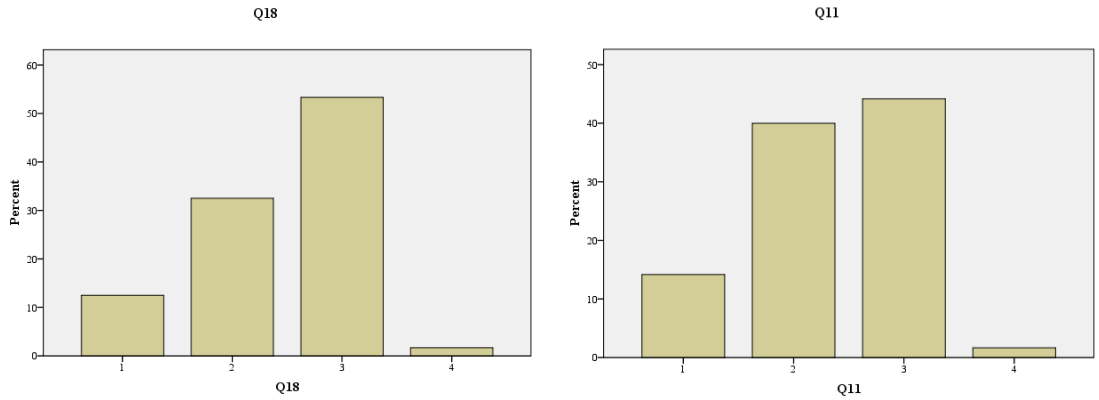
Research question 1 investigates Louisiana High School Principals' levels of agreement that the Career Diploma has symbolic value. This study contributes to the literature by supporting previous research on how cultural capital operates within a system of exchange based upon cultural knowledge and symbols that confer power and status in society (Bourdieu, 1977). The respondents inferred value upon a document that has neither inherent value, nor longitudinal data upon which to contextualize its value. Perceptions were based primarily upon symbolism associated with language (e.g. naming the document a *career* diploma), tradition (e.g. the historical development of vocational education), ideology associated with institutional approval (e.g. the contrast between earning any form of institutional approval versus failing to do so), and other subjective constructs that altogether contribute to a general consensus regarding such a document's value.

The symbolism in this study is specifically in reference to: dependability, intelligence, trustworthiness, hard work, competence, and responsibility. Principals agreed that the Career Diploma has overall symbolic value. The highest level of agreement is with The Career Diploma's symbolic value associated with dependability (e.g. comes to work on time). Levels of agreement were also strong with the Career Diploma's symbolic value associated with trustworthiness (e.g. follows rules when unsupervised) and hard work (e.g. works until a job is complete). The highest level of disagreement within this cluster was associated with intelligence (e.g. easily adapts to new challenges). Principals also disagreed with the statement that the Career Diploma has symbolic value associated with responsibility (e.g. does not require constant supervision). A distinction must be pointed out between principal agreement with "follows rules

when unsupervised" with reference to trustworthiness and principal disagreement with "does not require constant supervision" relative to responsibility. Supervision in the former refers to integrity, while supervision in the latter refers to industriousness; an individual can be honest, yet lack initiative. Additionally, agreement with statements of the Career Diploma's symbolic value associated with competence (e.g. completes assignments accurately) and dependability (e.g. comes to work on time) both included high rates of disagreement (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Item Analyses of Q18 (Competence) and Q11 (Dependability)



The idea that Career Diploma graduates are dependable, trustworthy, and hard working presents clear advantages over symbolism associated with dropout. The image of Career Diploma graduates lacking to some degree in intelligence, competence, and responsibility presents symbolic challenges for these individuals to overcome. In order to overcome these challenges, both the Louisiana Department of Education and individual school districts have the ability to design and present the Career Diploma in such a way as to increase its symbolic value as an assurance of intelligence, competence, and dependability. This could be achieved, perhaps, through specifications within the curriculum design to provide studies and experiences that lend

themselves to these symbolic values. Management of the ways in which the Career Diploma is presented to both the workforce and the general public may also help to achieve these ends.

Value as a Solution to Underlying Causes of Dropout

Research question 2 investigates Louisiana High School Principals' levels of agreement that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of dropout. The specific causes of dropout in this study refer to: lack of motivation to persist in school, student disconnection with school, lack of student sense of self efficacy, lack of student interest in school, lack of curricular relevance for students, and cultural disconnections between students and school staff. The participants agreed that the Career Diploma is valuable overall as a solution to causes of dropout. The highest level of agreement was with the statement that the Career Diploma is valuable as a motivator for students to persist in school. Principals also agreed that the Career Diploma is valuable in all other areas with the exception of bridging cultural divides between students and teachers.

The literature suggests that if the Career Diploma is effective in these specific areas, it will be valuable as a solution to underlying causes of dropout. According to Christenson & Thurlow (2004) dropout is typically preceded by a lack of connection with school faculty and other students, non-interest in the curriculum, and unpleasant feelings about school. Increasing student motivation to persist toward graduation, helping students to further connect with school, strengthening student self efficacy, making school more interesting, and bringing relevance to the curriculum are all attributes that could add value to any graduation alternative. Disagreement with the Career Diploma's ability to bridge cultural divides between students and school staff could be potentially addressed through implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and the integration of multicultural education into the Career Diploma curriculum (Banks, 2009).

Value as a Mitigator of Consequences

Research question 3 investigates Louisiana High School Principals' levels of agreement that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of not obtaining a standard diploma. Results are conceptualized in relation to the literature which links dropout with consequences such as: increased reliance upon government assistance, higher rates of unemployment, increased levels of incarceration, reduced levels of economic contribution to society, and other socioeconomically undesirable results (Johnson & Schoeni, 2007). Specific consequences addressed in this study include: difficulty maintaining steady employment, increased reliance upon government assistance, greater likelihood of engaging in criminal activity, having few career options, diminished ability to rise out of poverty, and lower likelihood of forming and maintaining a stable family unit.

Respondents agreed that the Career Diploma is valuable overall as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences of not obtaining a standard diploma. Agreement was highest with the ideas that the Career Diploma is valuable in its ability to decrease the likelihood of engagement in criminal activity and its ability to help impoverished individuals to rise out of poverty. Agreement was weakest with the Career Diploma's value in helping to decrease potential reliance upon government assistance. There were no value statements with which the collective respondents disagreed within this cluster.

Among the four clusters, this is the most dependent. In order for the Career Diploma to be valuable in as a mitigator of the consequences of not obtaining a standard diploma, it must first prove to be valuable in addressing underlying causes of dropout, then valuable relative to other graduation options, and then symbolically valuable socially and economically. Consensus that the Career Diploma has potential to be effective in this particular area communicates confidence among high school principals in the Career Diploma's eventual value as cultural capital.

Relative Value

Research question 4 investigates Louisiana high school principals' levels of agreement that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation options. Examples of the relative value discussed include: its value relative to a standard diploma, its value relative to job experience with no diploma, its value relative to a standard diploma with a career/technical endorsement, its value relative to a general education diploma (G.E.D.), its value beyond the minimum wage labor market, and its value outside the state of Louisiana. The respondents agreed that the Career Diploma has overall relative value. The highest level of agreement was with its value over job experience with no diploma. Agreement was also strong with the Career Diploma's value beyond the minimum wage job market and its value above that of a general education diploma. Agreement was weak with the Career Diploma being valuable outside of Louisiana. Respondents categorically disagreed with the notion of either the Career Diploma being as valuable as a standard diploma or being as valuable as a standard diploma with a career/technical endorsement. A wide range of vocational electives are available to both Career Diploma students and Career/Technical Endorsement students, and there is no evidence to suggest that there are more valuable technical skills taught to the Career/Technical Endorsement students than to the Career Diploma Students. However, public perception of a difference in value between the two could be significantly consequential.

It should be noted that the Career Diploma was not necessarily designed to be as valuable as a standard diploma or a standard diploma with a career/technical endorsement. Respondents agreed that it is more valuable than a G.E.D. which, incidentally, requires less coursework, but a more rigorous qualifying exam. There is no evidence to suggest that the Career Diploma was designed to be utilized outside of Louisiana. Agreement that the Career Diploma is more valuable than work experience without a standard diploma, and agreement that the Career

Diploma has value beyond the minimum wage labor market are essential to this document becoming widely accepted as a meaningful alternative to dropout.

Implications

The Career Diploma was introduced to help address dropout in Louisiana. Dropout in Louisiana and elsewhere is symptomatic of a variety of underlying causes. Dropout is also linked to several socioeconomic problems for both individual dropouts and the communities in which they live. In order for the Career Diploma to be an effective solution to dropout, it must help to address underlying causes of dropout. It must also result in socioeconomic opportunities beyond what a typical dropout could attain. In order for the Career Diploma to reliably lead to career opportunities, it must have value in relation to other graduation alternatives available to students, including the option of dropping out of school and entering the labor market. For the labor market to be confident in and receptive to Career Diploma graduates, this diploma must symbolically represent attributes that the labor force considers valuable.

Over a century ago, Booker T. Washington argued that the best way to overcome the race-based inequalities of his time was for African Americans to become socially respectable by integrating into the labor force and becoming productive contributors to the nation's economy (Kusmer, 1991). In this particular study, the population of concern is not limited to African Americans; although, African Americans do represent the largest proportion of dropouts in Louisiana (LDE, 2009). Washington (1903) stated that education for African Americans should focus on the "everyday practical things of life, upon something that is needed to be done, and something which they will be permitted to do in the community in which they reside" (p. 9). Washington (1903) promoted the idea that once African Americans had proven their ability to help themselves economically, racism would come to an end. Washington suggested that vocational, technical, and industrial forms of education would be far more beneficial than

education focused on the liberal arts in achieving these ends (Spivey, 1978). He further asserted that a liberal arts education was secondary and could be pursued at a later date (Washington, 1903). From this perspective, the alternative Career Diploma could be viewed as a stepping stone for a current population of potential dropouts to secure an economic foundation from which they could prepare successive generations to advance academically.

In an essay entitled, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others (1940)," W.E.B. DuBois suggested that Washington's program essentially asked African Americans to sacrifice political power, civil rights, and higher forms of education. DuBois (1940) explicated that Washington's policies contributed to social alienation, civil inferiority, and a loss of aid for institutions that promoted liberal arts education for African Americans. DuBois (1940) further argued that Washington's program reinforced notions of the inferiority of African Americans. From Dubois' (1940) perspective, Washington's program did not sufficiently address social injustices and the economic exploitation of African Americans. DuBois' point is supported by Bourdieu's (1976) studies on social reproduction through the public school system. According to Washington (1903), a generation of low-level laborers would be well-positioned to help their children and grandchildren rise to loftier academic and professional heights. Bourdieu (1976), however, identified a phenomenon of class cultures developing around structures of preparation for low-level labor. This could potentially result in a culture that becomes reliant upon such alternatives as the Career Diploma throughout generations. Bourdieu (1976) points out that patterns of socialization are often reproduced in schools due to a tendency for educational objectives and teacher expectations to be different for students that come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. In this light, the alternative Career Diploma could be considered to be a reinforcer for such differential expectations within the public school system.

Washington and DuBois highlighted the practical implications of educational alternatives, such as the Career Diploma. The debate between Snedden and Dewey in the early 1900s, however, emphasized the philosophical implications of what such an alternative vocational diploma could mean for the role of public education in a democratic society. Snedden argued that the public school system of his day was inefficient, because it merely provided for the needs of a small minority of intellectually-inclined, college-bound students and neglected the interests of the great majority of the nation's youth (Smith, 1999). Snedden considered specific skills training to be necessary for public education to meet the needs of the labor force and support the national economy. To provide industry, commerce, and agriculture a skilled labor force, Snedden advocated the establishment of vocational schools for the majority of students (Drost, 1967). Like current supporters of job-skills programs in the public school system, Snedden considered successful education to be that which provides students with specific skills, values, and attitudes that are valued by the labor force (Drost, 1967). Snedden's instrumental approach to education accepts as inevitable that certain students, particularly those from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds, are predestined to fill lower strata occupations within the labor force (Smith, 1999).

Dewey's (1916) critique of the social efficiency model of education, pointing out, "taking its stand upon a dogma of social predestination, it would assume that some are to continue to be wage earners under economic conditions like the present" (p. 317). Dewey (1916) further asserted that education which emphasizes narrow-skills instruction overlooks public education's responsibility for the preparation of students for all aspects of democratic citizenship. Much like DuBois, Dewey considered his objections to such a narrowly-conceived model of education to be not merely about education, but also about politics and society (Scheffler, 1995).

Neither viewing schools as servants of industry, nor considering students to be mere means to economic ends, Dewey asserted that public education, vocational or otherwise, should provide all students with the critical capacity to transform social and economic structures designed to reproduce class inequalities (Dewey, 1938). Dewey asserted that vocational education should be utilized to meet student needs, rather than the demands of the labor force, by helping to prepare students for a diverse range of occupational roles and social challenges (Dewey, 1916).

Ideally, the Career Diploma will reliably and consistently provide graduates with opportunities to gain entry-level employment in jobs with long-term career potential. If so, the Career Diploma will be an effective solution to dropout in Louisiana. This solution, however, would not be without consequential implications. Allowing public schools to facilitate a less-challenging pathway to the low-level labor market for the most at-risk students, i.e. impoverished and minority, arguably absolves the public school system of any responsibility to help reduce social inequalities that often regulate life opportunities for students within stratified socioeconomic boundaries. Overreliance on the Career Diploma by at-risk populations could inadvertently reinforce intergenerational socioeconomic stratification by legitimizing the acquisition of fundamental technical skills alone as a valid and legitimate form of educational success.

Before such philosophical and theoretical implications can be fully explored, however, the Career Diploma must be understood in terms of its practical effectiveness. The current study is an initial investigation into whether or not the Career Diploma is likely to lead to careers for those who earn it. Future studies could examine this subject from various perspectives, using different research methodologies. This could help to add depth and clarity regarding the practical value of this alternative to the traditional high school diploma.

The results of this study indicate that the Career Diploma may be a significant solution to underlying causes of dropout, which could lead to fewer at-risk students choosing to drop out of high school. The results also suggest that the Career Diploma holds promise as form of cultural capital that may help graduates to overcome and avoid typical consequences of not obtaining a standard high school diploma. The respondents indicated that the Career Diploma is less valuable than a standard diploma or standard diploma with a career/technical endorsement, but more valuable than either work experience alone or a general education diploma. There appears to be little confidence in the value of the Career Diploma outside of Louisiana.

That the lowest level of agreement is with the Career Diploma's symbolic value is an area of concern. If the Career Diploma were to become instrumental in preventing students from dropping out of high school, yet failed to reliably lead to career opportunities, it is unlikely that the Career Diploma would be effective in reducing the consequences of not obtaining a standard diploma. As a result of the Career Diploma being perceived to lack value in the labor market, it could eventually attract fewer students, which could potentially lead to a trend toward the original dropout problem that the Career Diploma was created to resolve. Addressing those areas wherein the Career Diploma is perceived to lack value may be critical to ensuring the ultimate success of the Career Diploma program.

Limitations

This study made three assumptions in Chapter 1. The first assumption was that respondents have reported their views accurately with regard to their assessments of the value of the Career Diploma. The researcher recorded a sample of perceptions as they existed at one point in time. Longitudinal data may reveal changes in perception as school districts implement the Career Diploma over time.

The second assumption was that the questionnaire is sufficiently comprehensive to investigate principal levels of agreement concerning the value of the Career Diploma. The researcher quantitatively investigated the subject matter with the use of a statistically-validated survey instrument. The researcher, however, did not include qualitative components, such as open-ended questions or interviews with participants. Such data could likely contribute to more in-depth understanding of the subject matter and may be useful in future studies.

The third assumption from Chapter 1 addressed the sample's representativeness of Louisiana public high school principals. The entire population was surveyed, and there was a 46.5% response rate. Responses were anonymous. Therefore the researcher knows neither levels of representativeness among geographic regions throughout the state nor representativeness of urban versus rural school principals. Such data may reveal patterns with regard to principal perceptions of the Career Diploma's value.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study is an initial investigation into the perceived value of Louisiana's Career Diploma. The results of this study are intended to be foundational to further studies of this subject matter. Qualitative inquiry into perceptions of the Career Diploma's value would likely add depth to the current results, reveal patterns in perception based upon distinctions between respondents, and generate new research questions. Future studies could also be inclusive of participants other than principals, such as: employers, legislators, students, parents, scholars, principals of nontraditional high schools, and others with diverse perspectives. Finally, longitudinal studies of Career Diploma graduates could provide evidence-based data involving the Career Diploma's value as a solution to dropout in Louisiana.

Summary

This study used a quantitative survey design of perceptual data regarding the value of Louisiana's alternative Career Diploma. This involved a measurement procedure that asked questions of a group of respondents via an online, researcher-designed questionnaire. The researcher administered a field-tested survey to Louisiana high school principals after the Louisiana State University Internal Review Board and the researcher's dissertation committee approved the study.

The researcher draws the following conclusions from the findings of the research questions: Principals in the study agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a solution to underlying causes of student dropout. Yet, respondents do not find the Career Diploma to be valuable in helping to bridge cultural divides between students and school staff. Principals in the study agree that the Career Diploma is valuable as a mitigator of socioeconomic consequences associated with dropout. This, however, will be largely contingent upon the value that the labor force places on the Career Diploma. Principals in the study agree that the Career Diploma is valuable relative to other graduation alternatives. According to the respondents, the Career Diploma is less valuable than a high school diploma but more valuable than either a general education diploma or work experience with no diploma. Principals in the study marginally agree that the Career Diploma has symbolic value. Based upon the results, Career Diploma graduates may encounter obstacles in the labor market based upon a potentially low symbolic value that the Career Diploma may hold, particularly with reference to intelligence.

A major implication of this study's findings is that the Louisiana's state legislature, state department of education, and public school systems have constructed an alternative diploma that principals in this study agree has the potential to be valuable as a solution to statewide dropout, but may be problematic for its bearers in the labor market. The findings suggest that, while the

Career Diploma is still in its early stages of implementation, attention should be paid to how it is perceived, particularly by entry-level employers. Perhaps by involving such stakeholders in key decisions regarding the Career Diploma, greater alignment may be achieved between what is valued by the labor market and what is included in the Career Diploma program curriculum. Attention could also be focused on how the Career Diploma is marketed by the Louisiana Department of education to both the general public and to the school leaders who administer the program.

Recommendations for further study include: expanding the survey to include a variety of groups with diverse perspectives, conducting qualitative investigations into the perceived value of the Career Diploma, and initiating longitudinal studies of Career Diploma graduates. Data from such studies could provide valuable information for decision makers that may result in the Career Diploma becoming a highly effective solution to dropout in Louisiana.

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APPENDIX A

CAREER DIPLOMA COURSE REQUIREMENTS

4 units of English
English I
English II
Two units from the following; Technical Reading and Writing, Business English, Business Communications, Using Research in Careers (1/2 credit), American Literature (1/2 credit), Film in America (1/2 credit), English III, English IV, or Senior Applications in English
4 units of Math
Algebra I (1 unit) OR Algebra I/Part I and Algebra I/Part II (2 units)
The remaining units shall be from the following: Technical Math, Medical Math, Applications in Statistics and Probability, Financial Math, Math Essentials, Algebra Ii, Advanced Math, Pre-Calculus, or Discrete Math
3 units of Science
Biology
One unit from the following physical science cluster: Physical Science, Integrated Science, Chemistry I, ChemCom, Physics I, or Physics of Technology
The remaining unit shall come from the following: Food Science, Forensic Science, Allied Health Science, Basic Body Structure and Function, Basic Physics with Applications, Aerospace Science, Earth Science, Agriscience II, Physics of Technology II, Environmental Science, Anatomy and Physiology, Animal Science, Biotechnology in Agriculture, Environmental Studies in Agriculture, Health Science II, EMT—Basic, or an additional course from the physical science cluster.
3 units of Social Studies
American History
½ unit of Civics
½ unit of Free Enterprise
One additional unit from the following: American Government, Economics, Law Studies, Psychology, Sociology, African-American Studies, Child Psychology and Parenthood Education.
1½ units of PE (or ROTC)
½ unit of Health
8 Electives

Total 23 credits

APPENDIX B

LOUISIANA CORE 4 COURSE REQUIREMENTS

4 units of English
English I
English II
English III
English IV
4 units of Math
Algebra I or Algebra I/Part 2
Geometry
Algebra II
Plus one of the following: Financial Math, Advanced Math/Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math/Functions and Statistics, Per-Calculus, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Math, or a locally-initiated elective approved by BESE as a math substitute.
4 units of Science
Biology
Chemistry
Plus 2 of the following: Physical Science, Integrated Science, Physics I, Physics of Technology I, Aerospace Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Earth Science, Environmental Science, Physics II, Physics of Technology II, Agriscience II, Anatomy and Physiology, or a locally-initiated elective approved by BESE as a science substitute.
4 units of Social Studies
Civics or AP American Government (1/2 unit)
Free Enterprise (1/2 unit)
American History
Plus one of the following: World History, World Geography, Western Civilization, or AP European History
The remaining unit shall come from the following: World History, World Geography, Western Civilization, AP European History, Law Studies, Psychology, Sociology, or African-American Studies
2 units of Foreign Language (shall be in the same foreign language sequence) or Speech
1 unit of Arts
Fine Arts Survey or Art, Dance, Music, Theatre Arts, or Applied Arts
1½ units of PE (or ROTC)
½ unit of Health
3 Electives

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Total 24 Credits

APPENDIX C

LOUISIANA BASIC CORE COURSE REQUIREMENTS

4 units of English
English I
English II
English III
English IV OR Senior Applications in English
4 units of Math
Algebra I (1 unit) OR Algebra I/Part I and Algebra I/Part II (2 units)
Geometry
The remaining unit(s) shall come from the following: Algebra II, Financial Math, Senior Applications in Math, Math Essentials, Advanced Math-Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math-Functions and Statistics, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Math, or a locally-initiated elective approved by BESE as a math substitute
3 units of Science
Biology
1 unit from the physical science cluster: Physical Science*, Integrated Science*, Chemistry I, Physics I, or Physics of Technology I
1 unit from the following courses: Aerospace Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Earth Science, Environmental Science, Physics II, Physics of Technology II, Agriscience II**, Anatomy and Physiology, or an additional course from the physical science cluster, or a locally-initiated elective approved by BESE as a science substitute.
*Note: Students may not take both Integrated Science and Physical Science.
**Note: Agriscience I is a prerequisite for Agriscience II and is an elective course.
3 units of Social Studies
American History
½ unit of Civics or AP American Government
½ unit of Free Enterprise
The remaining unit shall come from the following: World History, World Geography, Western Civilization, or AP European History
1½ units of PE (or ROTC)
½ unit of Health
8 Electives

_____

Total 24 Credits

APPENDIX D

POLICIES RELATED TO G.E.D. TESTING

Minimum Age for Testing
1.124.03
To qualify for the General Educational Development (GED) Test, an individual shall be 19 years of age or above. Individuals between 17–18 years of age or 16 years of age with an approved age waiver may qualify for the General Educational Development (GED) Test by taking the Official Half-Length GED Practice Test and scoring a minimum of 40 on each part with an average score of 45. Qualifying scores on the Official Half-Length GED Practice Test shall be certified by State-approved adult education sites of instruction.
1.124.04
Any State-approved adult education site of instruction may recommend an individual to take the General Educational Development (GED) Test.
1.124.05
The General Educational Development (GED) Test may not be administered to candidates who are enrolled in an accredited high school, or who have graduated from an accredited high school, or who have received a high school equivalency diploma.
Chapter I.C.5
Pre-GED/Skills Option Resource Guide 19
Score Requirements
1.124.06
To complete the General Educational Development (GED) Test successfully, a student must earn a minimum standard score of 40 on each of the five tests and an average standard score of 45 on the test battery.
1.124.07
The same form shall be used on all five tests when a student is being administered the General Educational Development (GED) Test.
Issuance of Equivalency Diplomas
1.124.12
A high school equivalency diploma will be issued from the Louisiana State Department of Education after the student has successfully completed the test of General Educational Development (GED).
1.124.15
A student who has earned an equivalency diploma is considered a Louisiana high school graduate in every respect.
1.124.16
A student who has received a high school equivalency diploma may return to a regular high school program but will not be allowed to participate in athletic activities.

APPENDIX E

ACADEMIC ENDORSEMENT COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 4 Units of English
- 4 Units of Math (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and one of: Advanced Math I or II, Calculus, Pre-Calculus, Probability & Statistics, or Discrete Math)
- 4 Units of Science (Biology, Chemistry, one Advanced Science, and one other Science)
- 4 Units of Social Studies
- 1/2 Unit of Health
- 1 1/2 Units of PE
- 1 Unit of Fine Arts Survey or 1 unit of Art, Music, Dance, or Theater
- 2 Units of Foreign Language
- 3 Units of Electives

High School Area of Concentration

Students satisfy this requirement by completing the Core Courses listed above.

GEE

Pass all four components with a score of Basic or above OR one of the following combinations with the ELA score at Basic or above:

- Approaching Basic, 1 Mastery or Advanced, Basic or above in the remaining two
- Approaching Basic, 2 Mastery or above

GPA/ACT

TOPS Opportunity GPA (2.5); ACT of 23

Other Performance Indicators

- Senior Project **OR**
- 1 Carnegie unit in an AP course with a score of 3 or higher on the AP exam **OR**
- 1 Carnegie unit in an IB course with a score of 4 or higher on the exam **OR**
- 3 college hours of non-remedial, articulated credit in core area (Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Foreign Language, or ELA)

AP: Advanced Placement
BESE: Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
ELA: English Language Arts
GPA: Grade Point Average
IBC: Industry-Based Certification
LEA: Local Education Agency
PE: Physical Education
TOPS: Louisiana Tuition Opportunity Program for Students

APPENDIX F

CAREER/TECHNICAL ENDORSEMENT COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 4 Units of English
- 4 Units of Math
- 4 Units of Science
- 4 Units of Social Studies
- 1/2 Unit of Health
- 1 1/2 Units of PE
- 1 Unit of Fine Arts Survey or 1 unit of Art, Music, Dance, or Theater
- 2 Units of Speech or
- Foreign Language
- 3 Electives including Computer-Related Course

_____

High School Area of Concentration

Students must complete four elective credits in an area of concentration and two related elective credits. The areas of concentration shall be developed locally and approved by BESE.

GEE

Pass all four components with a score of Basic or above OR one of the following combinations with the English Language Arts score at Basic or above:

- Approaching Basic, 1 Mastery or Advanced, Basic or above in the remaining two
- Approaching Basic, 2 Mastery or above

GPA/ACT

TOPS Opportunity GPA (2.5); ACT of 20 (or state average) or Silver Level on WorkKeys

Other Performance Indicators

- BESE-approved IBC; OR 3 college hours in a career technical area that articulate to a postsecondary institution, either by actually obtaining the credits and/or being waived from having to take such hours; AND
- A minimum of 90 work hours of work-based learning experience OR a Senior Project related to student's area of concentration with 20 hours of related work-based learning and mentoring

APPENDIX G

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Perceived Value of Career Diploma

1. Default Section

1. The Career Diploma is as valuable as a standard diploma.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

2. The career diploma represents trustworthiness (e.g. follows rules when unsupervised).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

3. The career diploma is valuable for keeping students interested in school.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

4. The career diploma is valuable in bridging cultural divides between students and teachers.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

5. Career diploma graduates are more able to form stable family units than dropouts.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

6. The career diploma is more valuable than job experience with no diploma.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

7. Career diploma graduates are more likely to maintain steady employment than dropouts.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

8. The career diploma is valuable as a motivator for students to persist in school.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

9. The career diploma represents hard work (e.g. works until a job is complete).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

10. Career diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to engage in criminal activity.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

11. The career diploma represents dependability (e.g. comes to work on time).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

Perceived Value of Career Diploma

12. Impoverished career diploma graduates have more opportunity to rise out of poverty than impoverished dropouts.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

13. The career diploma represents intelligence (e.g. easily adapts to new challenges).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

14. The career diploma is as valuable as a standard diploma with a Career/Technical endorsement.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

15. The career diploma has value beyond the minimum wage job market.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

16. The career diploma is valuable in making students feel connected to school.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

17. The career diploma is valuable in making school relevant for students.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

18. The career diploma represents competence (e.g. completes assignments accurately).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

19. The career diploma is more valuable than a general education diploma (G.E.D.).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

20. Career diploma graduates are less likely than dropouts to receive government assistance.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

21. The career diploma represents responsibility (e.g. does not require constant supervision).

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

22. The career diploma is valuable as a confidence builder for students.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX G CONTINUED

Perceived Value of Career Diploma

23. The career diploma is valuable outside of the state of Louisiana.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

24. Career diploma graduates have a wider range of career options than dropouts.

◯ Strong Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

25. Years of experience as an educator

◯ 0-5 ◯ 6-15 ◯ 16-25 ◯ 26+

26. What is your race?

[ ]

27. What is your gender?

[ ]

28. Is your school a Title I school?

[ ]

APPENDIX H

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (I.R.B.) APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
131 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.6792
irb@lsu.edu
lsu.edu/irb

-- Applicant,Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee c an be found at http://www.lsu.edu/screeningmembers.shtml

-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.

(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)

(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.

(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)

(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php.)

1) Principal Investigator: Marcil Seals **Ph:** 337.692.9038 **Rank** Grad. Student

Dept: ELRC **Ph:** 337.692.9038 **E-mail:** mseals@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

E5076
IRB# LSU Proposal #
Complete Application
Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title: The Louisiana Alternative Career Diploma as Cultural Capital: School Leaders' Perceptions of its Value for Students.

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 5-4-2013

4) Proposal? (yes or no) **If Yes, LSU Proposal Number**

Also, if YES, either ◯ **This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant**

OR ◯ **More IRB Applications will be filed later**

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) High school principals, guidance counselors, and vocational coordinators

*Circle any **"vulnerable populations" to be used**: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Marcil Seals **Date** April 1, 2010 (no per signatures)

** **I certify my responses are accurate and complete.** If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted √ Not Exempted ___ Category/Paragraph 1

Reviewer Mathews **Signature** Robert C. Mathews **Date** 5/5/10

Part 1: Determination of "Research" and Potential For Risk

- This section determines whether the project meets the Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) definition of research involving human subjects, and if not, whether it nevertheless presents more than "minimal risk" to human subjects that makes IRB review prudent and necessary.

APPENDIX I

PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

Dear _____:

In the summer of 2009, the Louisiana state legislature required that school districts offer an alternative career diploma. As a part of my doctoral studies at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, I am interested in discovering how school leaders perceive the value of this diploma. These opinions and perspectives will enable me to present an accurate description to district and state entities regarding the perceived value of this vocational credential.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to administrate this questionnaire to the principal, head guidance counselor, and vocational coordinator of your high school. Since the validity of the results depends on obtaining a high response rate, your participation is critical to the success of this study. The completion of the questionnaire should take between five and ten minutes.

Be assured that your responses will be held in the strictest confidence. In order to protect your anonymity, your school will neither be identified by name nor any other indicator. As soon as questionnaires are collected, they will be securely stored and then destroyed. If the results of this dissertation are written for publication, no identifying information will be used.

As a result of your participation, district administrators and state legislators will have a better understanding of the perceived value of the career diploma. Findings could result in legislative amendments and changes in policy that maximize the value and benefits of the career diploma for students. You will receive a summary of the research findings.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration and willingness to help with this study. If you have any questions, you can contact the person(s) below:

Marcil Seals
Graduate School of Education
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70803
(337) 692-9038
mseals@lsu.edu

Dr. Sarah Raines
Graduate School of Education
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70803
(901) 848-6948
sraines@lsu.edu

Sincerely,

Marcil C. Seals

APPENDIX J

LIST OF TRADITIONAL LOUISIANA HIGH SCHOOLS

Church Point High School
Crowley High School
Midland High School
Rayne High School
Iota High School
Elizabeth High School
Fairview High School
Kinder High School
Oakdale High School
Oberlin High School
Reeves High School
Donaldsonville High School
East Ascension High School
St. Amant High School
Dutchtown High School
Assumption High School
Bunkie High School
DeRidder High School
East Beauregard High School
Merryville High School
Singer High School
South Beauregard High School
Arcadia High School
Bienville High School
Castor High School
Gibsland-Coleman High School
Ringgold High School
Saline High School
Airline High School
Benton High School
Bossier High School
Haughton High School
Parkway High School
C.E. Byrd High School
Captain Shreve High School
Huntington High School
North Caddo High School
Northwood High School
Southwood High School
Mamou High School
Alfred M. Barbe High School
Bell City High School
DeQuincy High School
Sam Houston High School
Iowa High School
LaGrange High School
Starks High School
Sulphur High School
Vinton High School
Westlake High School
Grand Lake High School
Hackberry High School
Johnson Bayou High School
South Cameron High School
Block High School
Central High School
Harrisonburg High School
Sicily Island High School
Athens High School
Homer High School
Summerfield High School
Ferriday High School
Monterey High School
Vidalia High School
Logansport High School
Mansfield High School
Stanley High School
North DeSoto High School
Belaire High School
Broadmoor Senior High School
Glen Oaks Senior High School
Istrouma Senior High School
McKinley Senior High School
Northeast High School
Tara High School
Woodlawn High School
Lake Providence Senior High School
East Feliciana High School
Basile High School
Pine Prairie High School

APPENDIX J CONTINUED

Montgomery High School
Delcambre High School
Jeanerette Senior High School
Loreauville High School
Westgate High School
New Iberia Senior High School
Plaquemine Senior High School
White Castle High School
Jonesboro-Hodge High School
Quitman High School
Weston High School
Helen Cox Junior High School
East Jefferson High School
John Ehret High School
Grand Isle High School
L.W. Higgins High School
Grace King High School
Riverdale High School
West Jefferson High School
Thomas Jefferson Senior High School
Elton High School
Hathaway High School
Jennings High School
Lacassine High School
Lake Arthur High School
Welsh High School
Acadiana High School
Carencro High School
O. Comeaux High School
Lafayette High School
Northside High School
Central Lafourche High School
South Lafourche High School
Thibodaux High School
Jena High School
LaSalle High School
Choudrant High School
Dubach High School
Ruston High School
Simsboro High School
Albany High School
Denham Springs High School
Doyle High School
French Settlement High School
Holden High School
Live Oak High School
Springfield High School
Walker High School
Madison High School
Bastrop High School
Natchitoches Central High School
Warren Easton Senior High School
Benjamin Franklin High School
Ouachita Parish High School
Sterlington High School
West Monroe High School
West Ouachita High School
Richwood High School
Belle Chasse High School
South Plaquemines High School
Livonia High School
Alexandria Senior High School
Bolton High School
Buckeye High School
Glenmora High School
Oak Hill High School
Pineville High School
Plainview High School
Rapides High School
Tioga High School
Northwood High School
Red River High School
Delhi High School
Mangham High School
Rayville High School
Converse High School
Florien High School
Many High School
Negreet High School
Pleasant Hill High School
Zwolle High School
Chalmette High School

APPENDIX J CONTINUED

Hahnville High School
St. Helena Central High School
Lutcher High School
St. James High School
East St. John High School
West St. John High School
Eunice High School
Opelousas Senior High School
North Central High School
Beau Chene High School
Northwest High School
Port Barre High School
Breaux Bridge High School
Cecilia High School
St. Martinville Senior High School
Berwick High School
Centerville High School
Franklin Senior High School
Morgan City High School
Patterson High School
West St. Mary High School
Covington High School
Mandeville High School
Pearl River High School
Salmen High School
Slidell High School
Northshore High School
Fontainebleau High School
Lakeshore High School
Amite High School
Hammond High School
Independence High School
Kentwood High School
Loranger High School
Ponchatoula High School
Jewel M. Sumner High School
Davidson High School
H. L. Bourgeois High School
Ellender Memorial High School
South Terrebonne High School
Destrehan High School

Downsville High School
Farmerville High School
Abbeville High School
Erath High School
Gueydan High School
Kaplan High School
North Vermilion High School
Anacoco High School
Evans High School
Hicks High School
Hornbeck High School
Leesville High School
Pickering High School
Pitkin High School
Rosepine High School
Simpson High School
Franklinton High School
Pine High School
Varnado High School
Cotton Valley High School
Doyline High School
Minden High School
Sarepta High School
Shongaloo High School
Springhill High School
Brusly High School
Port Allen High School
Epps High School
Kilbourne High School
Oak Grove High School
West Feliciana High School
Calvin High School
Dodson High School
Winnfield Senior High School
Carroll High School
Neville High School
Wossman High School
Bogalusa High School
Zachary High School
Baker High School
Central High School

VITA

The author is a career educator with experience as an English teacher, an assistant principal, a state grant coordinator, and a school principal. The author has also worked as an adjunct instructor in the education department of the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. The author has conducted educational workshops throughout the state of Louisiana on a variety of educational topics and has presented original research at several national education conferences.